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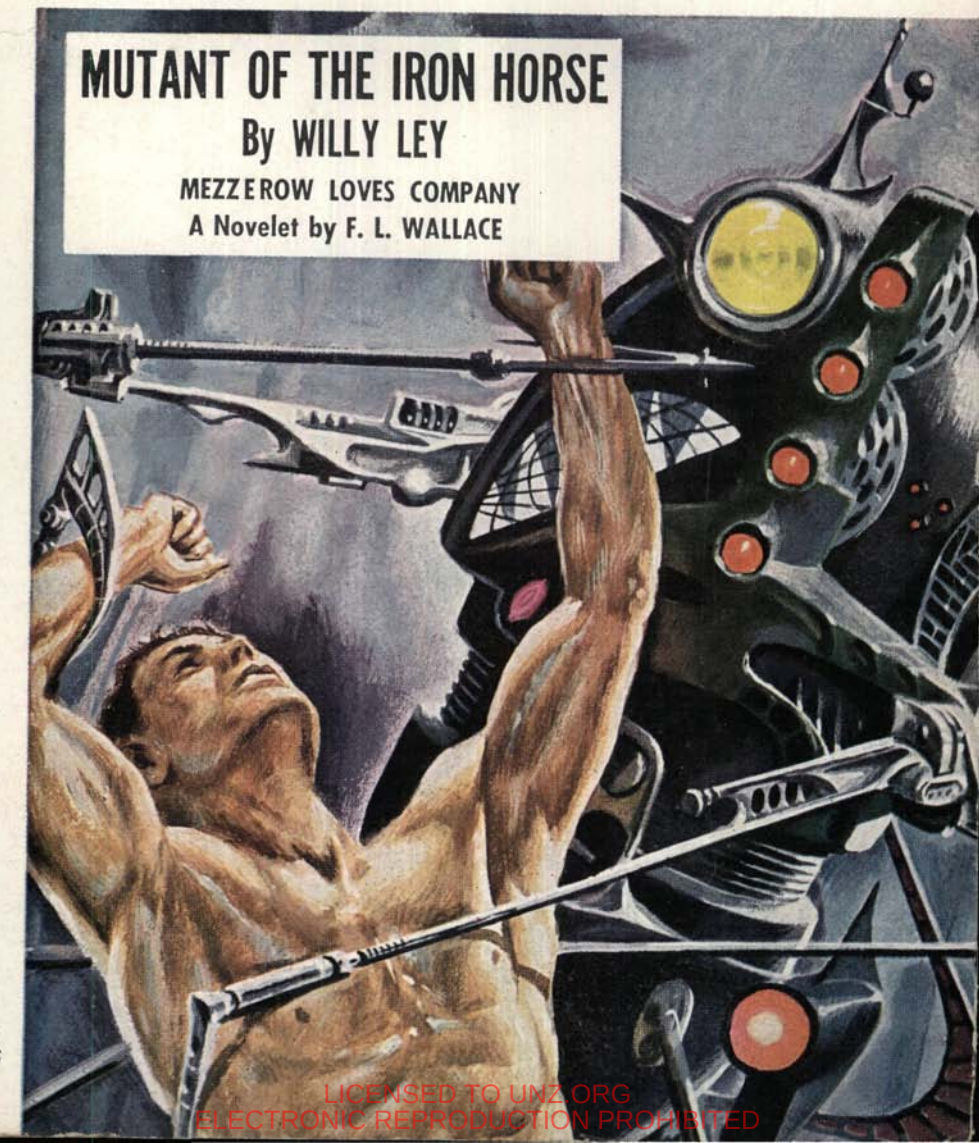
THE VENUS TRAP
By Evelyn E. Smith



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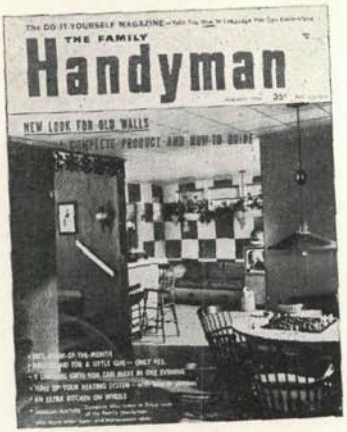

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JUNE, 1956 VOL. 12, NO. 2

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SCIENCE FICTION

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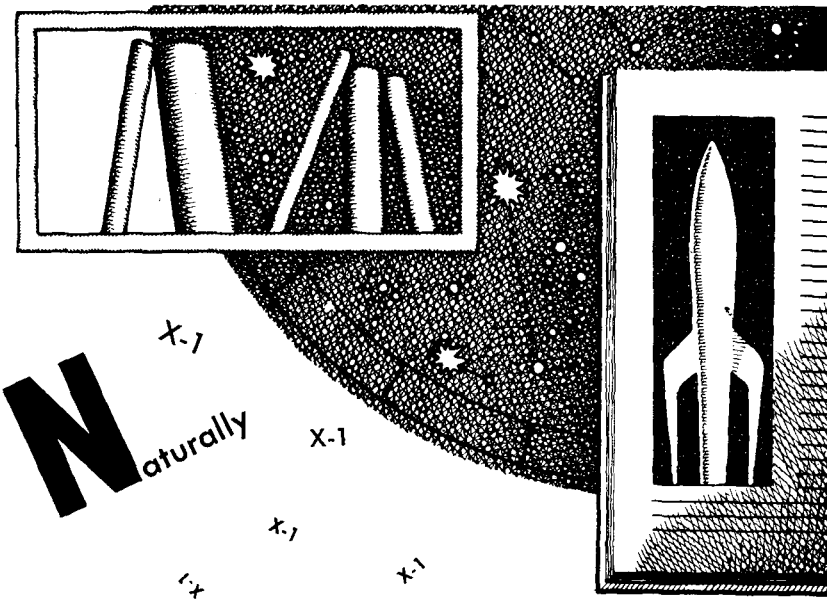

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FREEDOM FROM EVERYTHING

WITHOUT doubt the most important discovery ever made is in the hands of people who recognize only a fraction of its immense significance. It is not going too far to say that by broadcasting the discovery, this editorial may mark the end of all of mankind's problems.

Like every great formulation, the discovery looks simple:

"If you know why you feel angry," say psychoanalysts, "you don't have to be angry."

Simple on the surface, yes, but it may take centuries for every aspect to be explored and applied. Before we begin our preliminary extrapolation, however, let's test its validity in its current usage.

Assume you drive a car and someone has sideswiped you. You know that going into a rage is infantile behavior. So you pull over and carefully scrutinize your emotions. You feel angry because some roadhog endangered several lives and caused a few hundred dollars' worth of damage. Why? Because he's filled with aggressions. Are they your problem or his? His, of course. Retaliation would be your aggressions — your problem, not his. Still angry? Certainly not; having worked out the whole thing, you have no need to be angry.

The formulation naturally applies to all emotions: joy, despair, love, hate, fear and so forth. We could test each, but we'd only be confirming the soundness of the discovery. Nor should we waste time on the prospect of a world in which all emotions, once known, need not be expressed. Let's concentrate instead on the astonishing practical extensions.

If it's true that knowing why you feel an emotion removes the need to express it — and you've seen that it is so—then not applying the formula to all human functions is a refusal to face reality.

Take not-eating. Stated in blunt terms, we eat because we think (have been conditiond to believe) we are hungry. Any number of people, *knowing why they felt hungry*, have been able to fast for (seemingly) incredibly long periods.

True enough, some died and

(*Continued on page* 144)

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Mezzerow

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There were pride and indignation in Mezzerow's mission to Earth and yet a practical reason . . . but maybe he should have let bad enough alone!

Loves Company

By F. L. WALLACE

Illustrated by EMSH

THE OFFICIAL took their passports, scanning the immense variety of stamps he had to choose from. He selected one with multicolored ink that suited his fancy and smeared it against the small square of plastic.

"Marcus Mezzerow?" he asked, glancing at the older man and back at the passport. His lips quivered with amusement at what was printed there. "There seems to be a mistake in the name of the planet," he said. "It's hard to believe they'd call it Messy Row."

"There is a mistake," said Marcus heavily. "However, there's nothing you can do about it. It's listed as Messy Row on the charts."

The official's face twitched and he bent over the other passport. He was slow in stamping it. "Wilbur Mezzerow?" he asked the young man.

"That's me," said Wilbur. "Isn't it a terrible thing to do? You'd almost think people on Earth can't spell — or maybe they don't

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listen. That's why Pa and me are here."

"Wilbur, this man is not responsible for our misfortune," said Marcus. "Neither can he correct it. Don't bore him with our problems."

"Well, sure."

"Come on."

"Welcome to Earth," said the official as they walked away. He caught sight of a woman coming toward him and cringed inwardly before he recognized that she, too, had just arrived from one of the outer worlds. He could tell because of the absence of the identifying gleam in her eyes. On principle he'd stamp her passport with dull and dingy ink.

WILBUR scuffled along beside his father. He hadn't attained his full growth, but he was as tall though not as heavy as Marcus. "Where are we going now?" he asked. "Get the name changed?"

"Don't gawk," said Marcus, restraining his own tendency to gaze around in bewilderment. Things had changed since his father had been here. "No, we're not. It's simple, but it may take longer than we think. We have to act as if Earth is an unfriendly planet."

"Hardly seems like a planet."

"It is. If you scratch deep enough under those buildings, you'll find soil and rock." Even Marcus didn't know how deep that scratch would have to be.

"Seems hard to believe it was once like — uh — Mezzerow." Wilbur was looking at the buildings and pedestrians streaming past and the little flutter cars that filled the air. "Bet you can't find any place to be alone in."

"More people are alone within ten miles of us than you have ever seen," said Marcus. He stopped in front of a building and consulted a small notebook. The address agreed, but he looked in vain for a name. There wasn't a name on any of the buildings. Nevertheless, this ought to be it. They'd been walking for miles and he had checked all the streets. He spoke to Wilbur and they went inside.

It was a hotel. The Universe over, there is no mistaking a hotel for anything else. Continuous arrivals and departures stamp it with peculiar impermanency. A person might stay twenty years and yet seem as transient as the man still signing the registry.

A clerk sauntered over to the Mezzerows. He was plump, but the shoulders of his jacket were obviously much broader than he was. "Looking for someone?" he inquired.

"I'm looking for the Outer Hotel," said Marcus.

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"This is a hotel," the clerk said, raising his shoulders and letting them fall. One shoulder didn't come down, so he grasped the bottom of the sleeve and pulled it down.

"What's the name?"

The clerk yawned. "Doesn't have a name — just a number. No hotel has had a name for the last hundred years. Too many of them."

"My father stayed at the Outer Hotel fifty years ago, before he left to discover a new planet. It was at this address."

The clerk, wary of his shoulder pads, shrugged sideways. It gave him a bent look when one shoulder stayed back. "Maybe it wasn't a hundred years ago," he said to his fingernails. "Anyway, they don't have names now."

"This must be the old Outer Hotel," Marcus decided. "We'll stay here."

The clerk's aplomb was not as foolproof as he imagined. It slipped a trifle. "You want to stay here? I mean *really?*"

"Why not?" growled Marcus. "You have room, don't you? It seems like a decent place. I don't have any other recommendations."

"Certainly it's decent and we have room. I thought you might be more comfortable elsewhere. I can recommend an exclusive men's hotel to you."

"We are plain people and don't want anything exclusive," said Marcus. "Register us, please."

"I don't do menial tasks," said the clerk with an offended laugh. "I'm here for the sole purpose of imparting class to the hotel. Take your registry problems to the desk robot."

Wilbur looked curiously at the pudgy clerk as he walked away, smiling coyly at the passersby. "Pa, how can a man like him make this place seem classy?"

"Son, I don't know," said Marcus heavily. "Earth has changed since your grandfather described it to me. I don't propose to find out what's the matter with it. We'll just take care of our business and go home."

THEY signed at the desk, giving their baggage claim checks to the robot, who assured them that everything would be zipped straight to their room from the spaceport.

In spite of Wilbur's protests that he wasn't tired, that he was just getting used to walking again after being cramped in the ship, they went to their rooms to freshen up. Thus they missed the noontime exodus of workers from the buildings around them.

Marcus had food sent up, but didn't eat much, though initially he had been hungry. The lot 219 steaks were excellent in appear-

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ance, nicely seared and thick. Inside, they were gray and watery, with an offensive taste, obviously tank-grown. After a few bites, Marcus abandoned the meat and ate vegetables. These, though ill-flavored and artificially colored, he could eat without suspicion.

Wilbur consumed everything before him, ending by looking hungrily at the steak on his father's plate. Marcus hastily shoved the trays in the disposer slot. If he had time before he left Earth, he meant to find out what a "lot 219" steak was. He hoped it wasn't what he thought.

When they were ready, they dropped to the ground floor. The clerk who gave class to the hotel was nowhere in sight. They went out into the street and headed for the tall spire of Information Center. It was a landmark they couldn't miss. Every human who thought of visiting Earth was familiar with it. If a question couldn't be answered there, it was beyond the scope of human knowledge.

There were many more women than men on the streets. Marcus noted it, but didn't think it unusual. He had heard that women had more free time in the middle of the day on planets that had been settled for a long time. He walked on with a long stride, oblivious to the feminine glances he and his son attracted.

At Information Center, he consulted the index at the entrance, jostled by people from thousands of planets who were doing the same. The red line on the floor led to the planet section, which was what he wanted. Keeping check on Wilbur, who showed a tendency to wander, he followed it to the end.

The end was an immense room with innumerable small booths. Instinctively, Marcus distrusted booths; more than anything else, they resembled vertical coffins. Growling to Wilbur to stay close by, he went inside and closed the door. He inserted a coin and made the selection.

A harried face appeared on the viewplate. "Does your question require a human answer?"

"It certainly does," said Marcus. "I didn't come nine hundred and forty-seven light-years to be befuddled by a robot."

The harried face barked something unintelligible in another direction and then turned back to Marcus. "Very well. Question?"

"I want to request a change. My planet —"

"Planet? Change?" repeated the face. It disappeared and a finger took its place. The finger rifled rapidly down a vertical index. It stopped and stabbed and the index popped open. "Go to building P-CAF." The finger snatched a slip out of the open

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space and dropped the slip in a slot. "Go to the platform at the rear of this building. Take any tube with P-CAF on it. Apply at that building for the change."

Marcus wasn't surprised, but he felt annoyed. "Can't you make the change here? I don't like being shoved around."

"We are not authorized to make changes. We are merely what our name implies; we have the information to direct you to the proper sources. The slip I gave you is a map of the general vicinity of the place you want. You can't get lost."

"You gave me no map," snapped Marcus. The voice didn't answer him, though the finger still waved on the viewplate. He couldn't argue very well with a finger. The plate burped and a slip dropped out of the slot below it. Only then did he release the lever, allowing the finger to vanish.

MARCUS studied the map. P-CAF (Planets; changes, apply for) was between M-AVO (Marriages; alternate variations of) and M-AAD (Marriages; annulment and divorce).

Hastily, he stuffed the map in his pocket as Wilbur pressed the door, trying to look at what he had in his hand. It was nothing for a growing boy to see.

It wasn't a good map, since it didn't show where the building was in relation to the rest of the city. The transportation tube would take him there, but he'd have to find his own way back.

The tube that whisked them to P-CAF was occupied mainly by Outers, a circumstance that made the crowded uncomfortable trip more bearable. Marcus didn't talk to the others — their interests were worlds apart — but he felt closer to them than to the strange, frantic people of Earth.

P-CAF was neo-drive-in classical, a style once in vogue throughout the Universe. With Wilbur following, Marcus plunged in. It seemed strange that he had come nine hundred odd light-years for a matter that, once stated, would only take a few matters of some minor official's time. And yet it was necessary. For years, he had been writing requests without results.

It was not as crowded as Information Center. The booths were wider and Marcus decided they both could squeeze in. It was a historic moment: Wilbur should be present. After several trials, they did get in together.

The official who came to the plate was as relaxed as the other had been harried. "Planets; changes, apply for," he said. He had perfected the art of raising one eyebrow.

"That's why we're here," said

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Marcus, fumbling in his jacket. He was jammed against Wilbur and couldn't get his hand in his pocket.

"Land masses reshaped, oceans installed, or climate recycled?" asked the official.

"We don't want the climate changed," said Wilbur. "We've got lots of it — rain, hail, snow, hot weather. All in the same day — though not in the same place. It's a big planet, nearly as big as Earth."

"Wilbur, I'll do the talking," declared Marcus, still struggling to reach his pocket.

"Yes, Pa. But we don't want the continents reshaped. We like them as they are. And we've got enough oceans."

"Wilbur," Marcus said sharply, pulling his hand free. He held up a tattered chart.

"Are you sure you know what you do want?" asked the relaxed man with a yawn.

"I'm coming to it," said Marcus. "Fifty years ago, my father, Mathew Mezzerow, discovered a planet. Things being the way they were then, planet stealing and such, Captain Mezzerow didn't come back and report it. He settled on it right there, securing for his heirs and descendants a proper share of the new world."

"What do you expect for that, a medal?"

"He could have had a medal. Being practical, he preferred a part of the planet. Since then, we have become a thriving community. But we're not growing as fast as we should. That's why I'm here."

"You've come to the wrong place," said the man. "P-EHF is what you want."

"Planets; economic help for? No, we don't want that kind of aid. However, there is one insignificant mistake that has been hindering us. People don't settle the way they should. You see, though Captain Mathew Mezzerow didn't return to report his discovery in person, he did send in a routine claim. That's where the mistake was made. Naturally he named the planet after himself. Mezzerow. Mezz — uh — row. The second *e* is almost silent, hardly pronounced at all. But what do you think somebody — a robot, probably — called it?"

"I can't guess."

"Messy Row," said Marcus. "It maligns a good man's name. We're stuck with it because somebody bobbled."

"I ADMIT it isn't pretty," said the official with a cautious smile. "But I can't see that it affects anything. One name is as good as another."

"That's what you think," Marcus retorted. "I can see how the

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robot made the mistake and I'm not blaming it. My father sent in a verbal tape report. Mezzerow could sound a little like Messy Row. Anyway, it's had a bad effect on the settlers. Men come there because it sounds easy and relaxed, which it is, of course, to a point. But women avoid it. They don't like the sound of the name."

"Then it's really women you're concerned with," said the official. A cold glazed stare had replaced his indifference. "In any event, you've come to the wrong place. We reconstruct planets. Names are out of our jurisdiction."

"It makes things bad when there aren't enough women," continued Marcus. "Some men leave when they can't find anyone to marry." He crumpled the old chart in his hands. "It's not merely that, of course. Simple justice demands that a great man's name be properly honored."

"You've come to the wrong place for justice," said the official. "P-CAF doesn't make this kind of an adjustment. Let's see if I can't refer you to someone else." He rested his head on his hand. Then he straightened up, snapping his fingers. "Of course. If you want the name of a planet changed, you go to Astrogation; charts, errors, locations of."

"You do?" Marcus asked dubiously. Life on Mezzerow had not prepared him for the complexities of governmental organization.

"Certainly," said the official, happy that he had solved the problem. "Don't thank me. It's what I'm here for. Go to A-CELO."

"Where is it?"

The official frowned importantly and turned to the great vertical file that Marcus was learning to associate with all departments of the government. He stabbed his finger at a space, but nothing opened. "Seem to be all out of reference slips," he said with a casual lack of surprise. "Come back tomorrow and I may have some. It's quitting time now."

"Do I have to come back? A-CELO may be on the other side of the city from here."

"It may be," said the official, reaching for his jacket. "If you don't want to waste time, buy a map from an infolegger. It'll be a day old, but chances are it should be accurate on most things." The plate snapped off, leaving Marcus and his son staring at nothing.

Marcus got up and left the booth. "What's an infolegger?" asked Wilbur as he followed him.

"They move things fast on Earth," said Marcus tiredly. He hadn't realized how wearing it could be to chase down the thread of responsibility in a gov-

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ernment that had many things to look after. "An infolegger doesn't know any more about it than you do, but he'll sell you information that you can ordinarily get free from the government."

"But who buys from him?"

"Fools like me who get tired of running around. We'd better get back to the hotel."

"I wish we were on Messy — Mezzerow," said Wilbur wistfully. "Ma would have dinner ready now."

"I keep forgetting your appetite. All right, we'll eat as soon as we find a restaurant."

THEY found one a block away. It was easy enough to walk there. It was stopping that was hard. Marcus made his way to the side of the street and hauled Wilbur in out of the stream of pedestrians. Inside there was one vacant table which they promptly took, oblivious to the glares of those who were not so fast afoot.

Marcus studied the menu at length. To his disappointment, there was no lot 219 steak listed. Instead there were two other choices, a lot 313 and a miscellany steak. Marcus looked up to see that his son had already dialed his order. Questioning revealed that Wilbur had missed his afternoon snack and thought that a full portion of one steak and half of the other would compensate for his fast. "Vegetables, too," said Marcus.

"Pa, you know I don't like that stuff."

"Vegetables," said Marcus, watching to make sure his son selected a balanced diet. After deliberation, he decided on a high protein vegetable plate for himself, though ordinarily he liked meat. He couldn't get that idea out of his mind.

The low rectangular serving robot scurried up and began dispensing food with a flurry of extensibles. Marcus noted that the steaks were identical with those served in the hotel. "Waiter, what is the origin of those steaks?"

"The same as all meat. Hygienically grown in a bath of nutrients that supply all the necessary food elements. Trimmed daily and delivered fresh and tender, ready for instant preparation."

"I'm familiar with the process," snapped Marcus, wincing as his son chewed the gray, watery substance. "What I asked was the origin, the ultimate origin. From what animals were the first cells taken?"

"I don't know. No other protein source is so free from contamination."

"Will the manager know?"

"Perhaps."

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"Tell him I would like to see him."

"I'll pass the request along. But it won't do any good. The manager can't come. It's a robot attached to the building."

"Then I'll go to it," said Marcus, rising. "Keep the food warm. How do I get there?"

"The manager shouldn't be disturbed," said the robot as it placed thermoshields over the food. "It's the small room to the rear, at the right of the kitchen."

Marcus found the place without difficulty. The manager lighted up as he came in. The opposite wall blinked and a chair swung out for him. "Complaint?" said the manager hollowly. The manager was hollow.

"Not exactly," said Marcus, repeating his request.

The manager meditated briefly.

"Are you an Outer?"

"I am."

"I thought so. Only Outers ask that question. I'll have to find out some day."

"Make it today," said Marcus.

"An excellent thought," said the manager. "I'll do it. But this is a chain restaurant and so you'll have to wait. If you don't mind the delay, I'll plug in one of our remote information banks."

Marcus did mind delay, but it was worse not knowing. He waited.

"I HAVE it," said the robot after an interval. "There is great difficulty feeding a city this large. In fact, there is with all of Earth — it's greatly overpopulated."

"So I understand," mumbled Marcus.

"The trouble began forty-five or fifty years ago with the water supply," said the robot. "It was sanitary, but there was too great or not great enough concentration of minerals in it. Information isn't specific on this point. The robots in control of the tanks found that beef, pork, lamb and chicken in all their variety would not grow fast enough. Many tanks wouldn't grow at all.

"The robots communicated this fact to higher authorities and were told to find out how to correct the situation. They investigated and determined that either the entire water-system would have to be overhauled, or a new and hardier protein would have to be developed. Naturally, it would require incalculable labor to install a new water-system. They didn't recommend it."

"Naturally," said Marcus.

"The situation was critical. The city had to be fed. The tank robots were told to find the new protein. Resources were thrown open to them that weren't hitherto available. In a short time, they solved the problem. About half

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of the tanks that were not growing properly were cleaned out and the new protein placed in them. The old animal name system was outmoded so the new lot number system was devised and applied to every tank regardless of its ultimate origin."

"Then nobody has any idea what they're eating," said Marcus. "But what was that new protein? That's what I want to know."

"It was hardy. It came from the most adaptable creature on Earth," said the robot. "And there was another factor in favor of it. The flesh of all mammals is *nearly the same. But there are* differences. The ideal protein for a meat-eating animal is one which exactly matches the creature's own body, eliminating food that can't be fully utilized."

Marcus closed his eyes and grasped the arm of the chair.

"Do you feel ill?" inquired the managing robot. "Shall I call the doctor? No? Well, as I was saying, there was already a supply of animal tissue on hand. It was this that the robots used. It's funny that you're asking this. Not many people are so curious."

"They didn't care," snarled Marcus. "As long as they were fed, they didn't ask what it was."

"Why should they?" asked the robot. "The tissue was already well adapted to growth tanks. Scrupulously asceptic, in no way did it harm the original donors who were long since dead. And there was little difference in the use of it, anyway. No one would hesitate if he were injured and needed skin or part of a liver or a new eye. This was replacement from the inside, by a digestive process rather than a medical one."

"The robots took tissue from the surgery replacement tanks," said Marcus. "Do you deny it?"

"That's what I've been telling you," said the robot. "A very clever solution considering how little time they had. However *only about half of the tanks had* to be replaced."

"Cannibals," said Marcus, nearly destroying the chair as he hurled it away from him.

"What's a cannibal?" asked the robot.

But Marcus wasn't there to answer. He went back to the restaurant, under control by the time he reached the table. He couldn't tell Wilbur because Wilbur had finished eating except for the vegetables which were mostly untouched. Marcus sat down and took the shields off the food, looking at it gloomily.

"Pa, aren't you going to eat?" asked Wilbur.

"As soon as I get my breath back," he said. It wasn't bad when he ate, but the mere thought of

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food was distasteful. He glanced sternly at his son. "Wilbur, hereafter you may not order meat. As long as we are on Earth, you will ask for eggs."

"Just eggs?" said Wilbur incredulously. "Gee, they're real expensive here. Anyway, I don't like them without a rasher of —"

"Eggs," said Marcus. Another thought occurred to him. "Sunnyside up. No cook can disguise that."

THE sky was dark when they left the restaurant. After work, traffic had abated and the entertainment rush hadn't come on the streets, which were now curiously silent and deserted. Marcus caught sight of the tall spire of Information Center glistening against the evening sky.

"Where are we going?" asked Wilbur.

"To the hotel. We have a hard day's work tomorrow."

"Can we walk? I mean, we can't see anything in the tubes."

"It's a long walk."

"It's right over there. I've walked farther before breakfast."

Marcus noted with approval that Wilbur had used the Information Center as a landmark to deduce the correct location of the hotel. His training showed. Even in the confusion of the city, he wouldn't get lost. "It's farther than you think, but we'll walk if you want. It may be our last evening on Earth. At least, I sincerely hope so."

They went on. In time they saw what there was to see. It was a city, vast and sprawling, but still just another city Man had created. The buildings were huge, but constructed as all buildings had to be, out of stone and steel, concrete and plastic. Women were beautiful, tastefully gowned and coiffured, but it was easy to see that they were merely women. Shops were elaborate and fanciful, but there was a limit to what they displayed, an end to the free play of fancy.

By the time they realized they were tired, they were close to the hotel. There wasn't any use in seeking transportation, since they'd get where they were going almost as fast either way. They had kept to the main thoroughfares since there was more to see. But Marcus had quickly accustomed himself to the pattern of streets and as they neared their destination he saw a short cut which they took.

It was getting late and the street was dark. He began to wonder whether they should have come this way. He decided they shouldn't have. A faint red flash from the doorway indicated that his tardy decision was sound but useless. His knees tingled where the red flash struck him and in

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the middle of a stride he felt he didn't have any feet. He fell forward, trying to shield Wilbur. Wilbur was falling, too, and they collided on the downward arc.

Hands seized him, lifting him up. He was in no condition to struggle. Besides it wasn't safe. A tingler wasn't a lethal weapon, but it could have unpleasant effects if used carelessly or hastily. He didn't think they were in any real danger and it was best not to provoke their captors.

BY THE time he had recovered sufficiently to be aware of what was going on, he found he had been carried to a space between two buildings, hidden from the street by a masonry projection. Wilbur was sitting beside him and a dim light played on them.

"Don't move," said a voice that made an effort to be rough and hard, but failed by an octave. Now that Marcus thought of it the hands that had lifted him were small and soft. Their captors were women. The disconnected impressions of the city seemed to fall into a pattern. He was not greatly surprised at what was happening.

The light moved closer and Marcus could make out the figure of the woman who held it. Behind her were others — all women. But even delicate hands were capable of leveling a tingler. "Don't say anything," he said to his son in a low voice. Wilbur nodded dazedly.

"No whispering," barked the soprano, shining the light directly in his eyes. "Now, are either of you married?"

Marcus sighed; so that was it. Poor Earth was in a bad way when a pudgy unattractive clerk could get a high-salaried job solely because he was male.

"Answer me," demanded the high unsteady voice. "Are either of you married? On Earth, I mean."

Marcus could see her clearly, now that his eyes had become accustomed to the light. She was young, barely out of her teens.

"What kind of question is that? When you're married, you're married. It doesn't matter where you are." On Earth, apparently, it did.

"Outers," she exclaimed happily. "I've always hoped I'd find one. They're real men. Now let's see, which one shall I take?" She flashed the light on Wilbur, who squirmed and blinked.

"He's younger and will probably last longer," she said critically. "On the other hand, he'll be clumsy and inexperienced."

She turned to Marcus. "You need a shave," she said crisply. "Your beard is turning gray. I think I'll take you. Older men are nice."

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"You can't have me," said Marcus. She was near and he could have taken both the weapon and the light from her. But he couldn't stand, much less walk, and there were other women in the background, all armed probably, watching the girl who seemed to be their leader. "You see, I am married. Wilma wouldn't like it, if I took another wife."

"Not even just for the time you're on Earth? It isn't much to ask." She turned the light on herself. "Am I unattractive?"

She was not outstandingly beautiful, but since she was dressed as scantily as law allowed and fashion decreed Marcus could see her desirability. "How old are you?" he asked.

"Old enough," she said. "In eleven months, I'll be twenty-one."

"You're pretty," said Marcus. "If I were fifteen or twenty years younger — and not married — I'd come courting."

"But you did." she said in amazement. "Why did you come down a dark street, if you weren't looking for romance?"

THIS, it seemed, is what passed for romance on Earth. Men must be outnumbered at least three to one. It tied in with what he had so far observed. "I'm sorry for your trouble," he said. "But you must remember that we're Outers. We're not familiar with your customs. We were merely taking a short cut to our hotel."

She gestured in sullen defeat. "I suppose it was a mistake. But why can't I have him, then? He's not married."

"He isn't, nor will he be for some time. He has barely turned seventeen. I won't give my permission."

"He's your son? Then you are experienced. Are you sure you won't reconsider me — just while you're on Earth? I told you I don't like young men. Maybe that's because my father was an older man."

"I'm sure he was," said Marcus. "However that's no reason to find me irresistible." He tried to stand, but his legs were rubbery and he sat down quickly.

She looked at him with concern. "Does it hurt? I guess we gave you the strongest charge." She handed him the light and went to the women who were standing some distance behind her. He heard her whispering. Presently she came back.

She knelt beside him and began rubbing his legs. "I sent them away," she said. "They're going to look for someone else. It was my turn to propose to whomever we captured, but now you spoiled it."

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He smiled at her earnestness. "I'm sure you deserve better than you're apt to find with these strange methods of courtship. However I think you should help my son. You gave him a charge, too."

"I bet I did," she said scornfully. "Don't worry about him. Kids recover easily."

"Should I clout her, Pa?" asked Wilbur as he stood up, bending his knees gingerly. "She had no business shooting us."

"She didn't, but you have no business talking like that. Touch her and I'll wallop you."

The girl ignored Wilbur, putting her arms around Marcus and helping him to his feet. From the girl's reaction to him you'd never think so, but he was getting old. The first step was proof of it. He could walk unaided, but it felt as if someone were pulling pins out of his legs at the rate of two or three a second.

"I'll go with you to the hotel," said the girl. "There are probably other marriage gangs out. If they see me with you, they'll think I've already made my catch."

Marcus frowned in the darkness. Wilbur was getting entirely the wrong idea about women. He'd find it difficult to adjust to the different conditions at home. Marcus told the girl their names and asked hers.

"Mary Ellen."

"That's all, Mary Ellen?"

"Of course, I have a last name, but I'm hoping to change it."

He sighed in resignation. "Mary Ellen, we won't discuss marriage again. Is this clear? However I have plans for you. I'll get in touch with you before we leave Earth." They were nearing a brightly lit thoroughfare and he felt safer.

"I was hoping you'd say that," she said wistfully. She dug into a tiny purse and handed him a card. "You'll notice there's another name on it, too. That's Chloe, my half-sister. She's smart and I like her, but I hope you don't like her — not better than me, anyway."

"I'm sure I won't. But why half-sister? I'd think it would be

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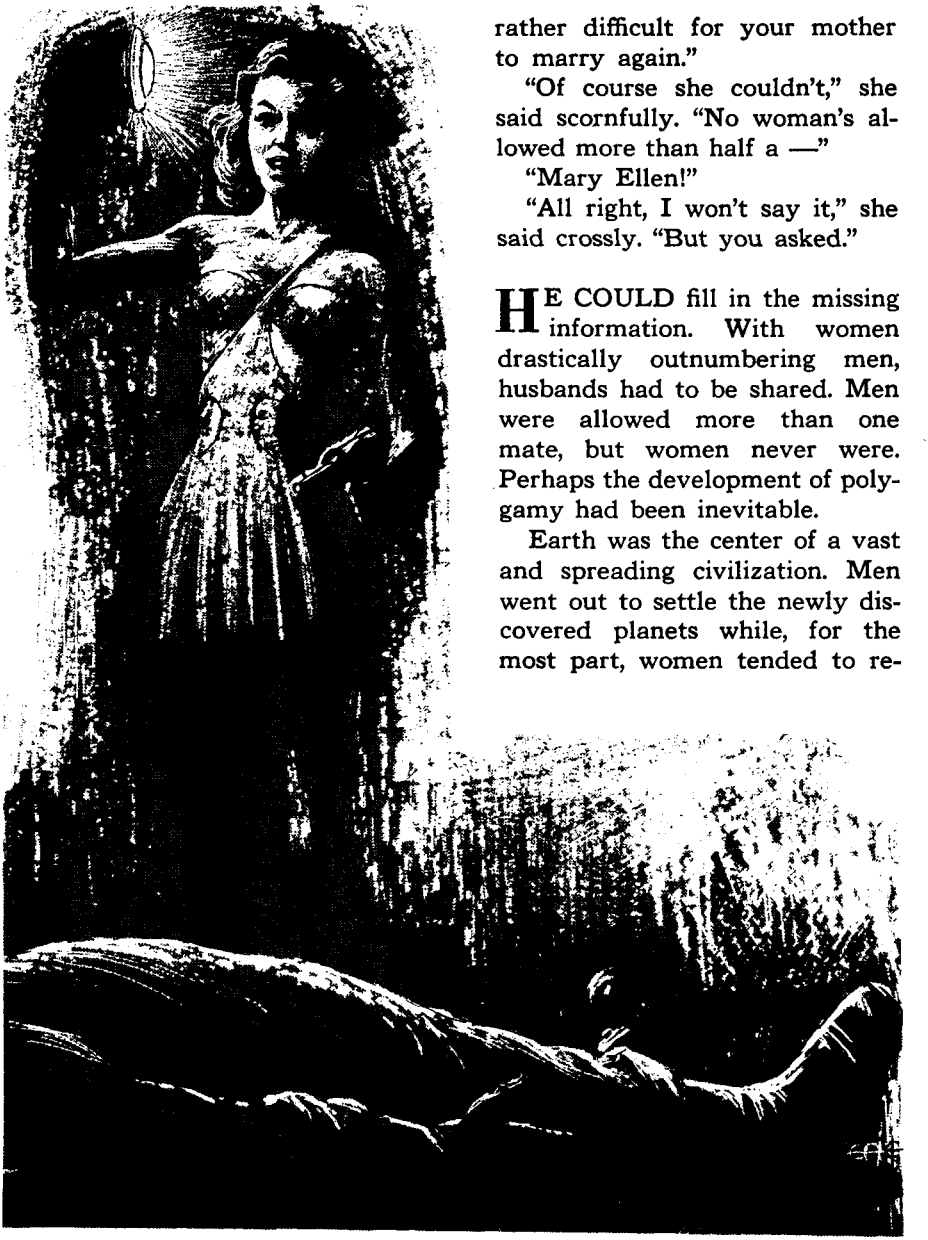

rather difficult for your mother to marry again."

"Of course she couldn't," she said scornfully. "No woman's allowed more than half a —"

"Mary Ellen!"

"All right, I won't say it," she said crossly. "But you asked."

HE COULD fill in the missing information. With women drastically outnumbering men, husbands had to be shared. Men were allowed more than one mate, but women never were. Perhaps the development of polygamy had been inevitable.

Earth was the center of a vast and spreading civilization. Men went out to settle the newly discovered planets while, for the most part, women tended to re-

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main behind. More than that, there were some women who came to Earth from planets that had been settled longer, attracted by the glamor of an older civilization and high-paying jobs, never realizing until they got there the other conditions that went with it.

Earth's dilemma was therefore a partial solution to one of the problems of his own planet. But the important problem, getting the name changed to Mezzerow, was harder than he had anticipated. He wasn't looking forward to tomorrow.

He noticed Mary Ellen glancing curiously around. "Is there anything wrong?" he asked.

"Nooo. It's just sort of funny that you'd stay here — in the heart of the unmarried girls' residential district." She grinned at him. "Maybe I'd better go in with you."

"I think you'd better," he said. That's what the pudgy clerk had meant. He should have listened to him and gone to the men's hotel.

The lobby was crowded with women, many of whom, he suspected, had been waiting for their return. On a man-starved planet, word got around. Perhaps he was imagining it, but he thought he heard an audible sigh of disappointment when they came in with Mary Ellen. She had more than repaid them for the few anxious moments she had caused. Much more, though she didn't know it yet.

They went directly to their rooms and Marcus sent Wilbur inside, lingering at the door to talk with the girl. "Should I come in?" she asked hopefully. "I'm really sorry about your legs."

"You will not come in, Mary Ellen. I don't trust myself alone with you."

"You mean it?"

"I was never more sincere." He almost believed it himself.

"We don't *have* to get married if you're not going to be here long enough to make it worthwhile," she said happily. "I was thinking —"

He glanced warningly inside the room.

"He's a big nuisance," she whispered. "Look. I've got to work tomorrow, but in the evening I'll be free. Put the kid on a merry-go-round and come and see me, huh?" She threw her arms around Marcus and kissed him passionately. Then she turned and ran down the hall.

Marcus shook his head and went into his room.

IN THE morning, Marcus had little difficulty contacting an infolegger. For a rather large sum, a map purporting to show the location of A-CELO exchanged

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hands. For another sum, a map of the principal transportation tubes was added to it. Both were assuredly out of date in many respects, but were probably correct in the one detail Marcus was concerned with.

They started rather late to avoid the morning rush. There were some transportation complications. At the first trial they arrived at the wrong section of the city. After consultation with various passengers and robot way stations, they got it straightened out. Penciling corrections on the map, they retraced their route, making only one mistake along the way. This mistake was not their fault. A transfer junction had been relocated since they had passed through it on the way out.

They got to their destination in good time, perhaps faster than if they had used the services of Information Center. A-CELO was also an example of neo-drive-in classical. But instead of resembling something appropriate, say a five or six pointed star, it appeared to be a mere jumble of children's curv-blocks. A closer look convinced Marcus that his first appraisal had been wrong. Originally it must have been built to house another A-function. Perhaps A-WR (Anatomy; woman, reclining).

Whatever it was on the outside, A-CELO was confusion within. Marcus found it impossible to get near the question booths. Robots scurried about in seemingly useless tasks and workmen shouted orders that no one paid attention to. In the midst of the dust and turmoil, one man stood on a platform and watched the frantic effort with bored serenity.

"Moving," he said automatically as Marcus approached.

"Where to?"

"I don't know. It depends on whom we can bump."

MARCUS paled visibly. They were moving and didn't know where. Another day and his map was useless. And if this man was right, even Information Center wouldn't know where A-CELO was tomorrow. "Isn't there a planning commission?" he said. "Don't they tell you where to move?"

The man shrugged. "There's a planning commission. But they had too many responsibilities and had to move to a larger building, the same as we're doing. Until they get settled, everyone's on his own." The man spoke quietly into the mike and the tempo of the removal robots accelerated. He turned back to Marcus and added an explanation: "Three exploration ships returned yesterday, loaded to the brim with

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micro-data. That's why we have to move."

Marcus rubbed his face. He could see it posed a problem. It was not merely the storage of new data, the data also had to be made available to the public. This required new offices, human supervisors, robot clerks.

That was the way they did things on Earth, but he wished they'd waited a few days. "You can't be moving this stuff out on the streets. Somebody must have an idea where you're going. Tell me who he is. I've got to find out where you'll be tomorrow."

"Oh, no. If you found where we're moving, you'd learn who we're going to bump," said the man with cheerful cunning. "They'd take steps to repel us. Can't have that." The man scratched his head. "Tell you, if you're really honest — if you're not a department spy — I can show you how to take care of your business today."

"I'm an Outer," said Marcus. "I don't care about your squabbles. I want to get something settled and get out of here."

"You look like an Outer," said the man. "Here's what you do. Part of the department is still functioning. Go to the side entrance. Question booths there are open." He turned back to the mike and barked orders that had no visible effect on anything.

THE man was partly wrong. The side entrance was open, but corridors and booths were jammed with displaced information seekers. Marcus was not easily discouraged. By now he was accustomed to the vast machinations required for the simplest things. He went to the back entrance. It, too, was jammed, but after a short desperate struggle he squeezed into a booth, leaving Wilbur to hang on the outside.

The official who answered him was sleepy and harassed, a difficult expression. He yawned and took his feet off the desk to acknowledge the call and then a robot removed the desk. He had no place to put his feet so he kept them firmly on the floor as if he expected that, too, to vanish.

Marcus stated the request clearly, spreading the chart for the man to see. "Here is the original from which the phototape was made and sent to Earth with his comments. I don't know what happened here. Perhaps the tape was fuzzy or it may have been fogged in transit by radiation. Or it may have been faulty interpretation on the part of a robot."

The official peered out of the view plate. "Messy Row. Mezzerow. Ha, ha." He laughed perfunctorily and got up to pace. A robot came near the chair and he sat down hastily.

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"Here, you can see that in his own hand he spelled it Mezzerow," said Marcus. "He named it after himself as every explorer is entitled to do once in his career. I ask that in simple justice the mistake be corrected. I have a petition signed by everyone on the planet."

The official waved the documents back. "It doesn't matter who signed," he said. "We don't allow these things to influence our decision." He put his head in his hand though he had no desk for his elbow. His lips moved soundlessly as he framed the reply.

"I want to give you an insight to our problems," he said. "First, consider pilots. There are all sorts of beautiful names for planets. Plum Branch, Coarsegold, Waves End, but there's only one Messy Row. It's a bright spot on their voyage. They look at the charts and see it — Messy Row. They laugh. Laughter is a therapeutic force against the loneliness of space. The name of your planet is distinctive."

"We don't care for the distinction," said Marcus. "It's got so bad, we call it Messy Row ourselves, when we're not thinking. Who's going to settle on a planet they laugh at?" The official didn't seem to hear. Marcus adjusted the volume control, but there didn't seem to be anything wrong with the sound or the volume.

"This is only a small part of it," continued the man. "Do you have any idea how many charts we print? You would have us make them obsolete. Think of the ships roaming through space, many never touching Earth. How can we reach them with corrected charts?"

"I'm glad you said corrected charts," said Marcus. "But corrected charts shouldn't be any harder to deliver than new ones — which, you'll admit, you're always making."

"I can't compromise our famous accuracy for the whims of a few selfish individuals," said the official. He stood up and this time the robot whisked the chair away. He smiled and reached out his hand for the familiar vertical file. The file wasn't there, but a robot was. It took his hand and tried to lead him away. He shook himself loose. "You can see we're busy. Come back when we're not in the midst of an upheaval. I might consider a request that at present I must turn down." He walked briskly away, leaving Marcus with a fine view of an empty room — until a robot came and took the viewplate to the other end.

Marcus eased out of the booth. Wilbur was waiting with an anxious face. "I know it's past noon," he said gloomily to his son.

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"We'll get something to eat. Eggs." Wilbur knew better than to protest.

THEY left A-CELO before the removal robots arrived at the rear section. In the quiet of a nearby restaurant Marcus considered the problem anew. The mission hadn't been entirely a failure. He could accomplish one important task without the aid of any government agency. In fact, it was better if he didn't ask their help.

But he owed something to the memory of Captain Mathew Mezzerow. Mezzerow his father had called the planet — and Mezzerow it was going to be.

There was also Wilma. She had arrived when both she and the settlement were quite young. Courted and feted and proposed to endlessly, she had found the excitement of being the center of attention irresistible. She hadn't minded the name then, not since she was the prettiest, most attractive girl there. There weren't many others.

But she had changed as Messy Row had grown. They had four sons now, Wilbur the oldest. Four sons. She was not concerned whether they would marry. Her sons were smart and handsome and belonged to the best family — they would experience no trouble in finding wives. But if they did she could always take them visiting — to a planet on which there was no woman shortage.

Once she had been slightly giddy, even after they were married. Marcus had often wondered how her lashes could possibly remain intact when other men came near. She had outgrown that phase and when the chrysalis burst it revealed a different woman.

Out of the flirtatious girl came the homemaker. Everything near her was immaculate. Fences around the house were whitewashed and the lawns were always mowed. Inside, everything was as tidy as a pin. Mud was never tracked in. Wilma no longer approved of Messy Row as the name of any planet on which she lived.

Marcus had to have help. Someone who lived on Earth would know the proper approach better than he. He fished out the card Mary Ellen had given him and the longer he looked the more certain he was that he had found the person. It was not Mary Ellen. It was her sister.

Mary Ellen and Chloe — no last names given. Apparently this was custom, the way unmarried girls informed the world that they were looking for mates. In addition to their names was the address at which they both lived.

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There was also the occupation of each. Mary Ellen was a junior attendant, whatever that was. But Chloe was far more important. She was an astrographer, a senior supervisor astrographer.

Marcus ate rapidly, a definite plan materializing with each bite. Chloe was the key. With her aid, he should be able to change Messy Row. He smiled reflectively. With what he had to offer she would certainly consent to help him — even if it was illegal.

MARY Ellen was not at home, but Chloe was and she welcomed them. Marcus truthfully explained how they'd met her sister. Chloe commented unfavorably on the marriage gangs and, though Marcus agreed, he received the remarks in silence. It was not for him to change the mores of Earth. Society had to work with what there was.

Chloe was small and dark in contrast to the larger blonde Mary Ellen. She was older, too. Once she must have been quite pretty, but instead of easing graciously into the poise of maturity she had been forced into the early thirties without a husband. The struggle showed.

She was cordial when they came in and even more cordial when he finished outlining his plan. "Yes, something can be done," she said quietly. "I will set up the organization and ship them out in groups of ten. I have a vacation in a few months and Mary Ellen and I will come then." She glanced at him anxiously. "That is, if you think I'm needed."

"You are," he assured her. "We need wives, mothers, skilled technicians. I can't think of anyone who will fit the description better."

"Then you'll see me again," she said. "And not merely for the reasons you think. You see, I have a high-salaried job and could have been married before this. But it didn't seem right. I want to feel I'm of some use to a civilization that seems to have forgotten people like me exist."

"Mezzerow needs you," he said. "I was thinking of a man I know. Joe Ainsworth, a quiet thoughtful fellow of about thirty-five or thirty-seven. His trouble has been that he likes pretty women who are also intelligent. I'll have him keep an eye out for you."

She smiled and the transformation took place. She *was* pretty. Marcus wondered whether there was such a person as Joe Ainsworth. There must be, in kind if not in name.

"So much for that," said Chloe briskly. "The rest of your plan for Messy Row is a fine example of muddy thinking. In the first place I work for a private company, not the government."

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"But you make government charts."

"True. But let me show you what I mean. What's the code number of the chart Messy Row is on?"

Marcus quoted it from memory. The code of a map on which a given system could be found was almost as important as the name.

Chloe closed her eyes. "No," she said when she opened them. "That's done in another department. I couldn't possibly change it to Mezzerow."

"But if you changed it, the name would stay," said Marcus. "I'll give you money to see that it gets done. Once it's on the map nobody will say anything. Even if they do notice, all they'll know is that there's a conflict between early and late editions. They'll have to go directly to the source to straighten it out. And we're the source."

Chloe smiled fleetingly. "It's never done that way. Do you think they'd send nine hundred and forty-seven light-years to find whether the name is Messy Row or Mezzerow?" She crossed her legs and they were nice legs. There had to be a Joe Ainsworth.

"It won't work," said Chloe. "I can't make the change myself or even bribe someone to do it." She noticed his dejection and touched his hand. "Don't be discouraged. There's another way. An Outer wouldn't think of it because he doesn't know what goes on behind the scenes."

"I've seen enough to give me a good idea," said Marcus.

"I wonder. Have you noticed that when you ask for information you are always answered by a human? And just as obviously he doesn't know. He has to contact a robot and relay the information along."

HE HADN'T thought of it. The omnipresent vertical file was, in reality, a robot memory bank. Why not give the robot a voice and dispense with innumerable men and women? The question was on his face when he looked at Chloe.

"Robots are logical — nothing more," she said. "Most questions can't be given black and white answers. There must be an intermediary who understands the limitations of the mechanical mind to interpret it to the public."

"I don't see how this is going to help me," he said.

"You've been trying to get an official to say that you're right and he'll see that the change is made. Abandon that approach. He'll never take the time. Write your request."

"For forty years we've been writing. That's why I'm here."

Chloe smiled again. "The num-

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ber of letters received by the government in one year reaches a remarkable total. Or perhaps the total isn't huge when you consider how many humans in the Universe there are. Anyway, off-planet letters are never opened, because there's no way to tell from the outside which are important. So they're all pulped and used as nutrients in food tanks."

Marcus nodded dubiously. "I see. Anyone who thinks he has something important will come here . . . as I did. And if he isn't satisfied he tries to go over the head of whoever refused the request. This volume is still great, but it's small enough to be processed without falling hopelessly behind."

"Exactly. And if you phrase your request properly there's a good chance it will be granted, even if it is foolish."

"This isn't foolish," said Marcus, rubbing his hands. "I've got all the facts. I can write them in my sleep."

"Who said anything about facts?" said Chloe. "The worst thing you can do is to give them facts. Don't you see what I'm trying to tell you?"

Marcus took a deep breath. "No," he said.

"Let's go over it again. Mathew Mezzerow discovered a planet and named it after himself. Does this mean anything? Not really. Does it mean anything that Messy Row will be settled more slowly because of the name? Again no. Thousands of other planets will gain the settlers that Messy Row loses. The robot will refuse a request based on facts and from the government's viewpoint will be justified."

"But you just said robots don't handle requests."

"Face to face they don't. You would resent it as an arrogant bureaucracy being told you couldn't have something by a robot. But you don't see who processes written requests. And in these matters the government uses robots because they're more efficient."

It was too complex for Marcus. Robots processed written requests, but not those made in person. Robots were logical and only logical and therefore ordinarily should not be appealed to on the basis of reason.

He swallowed hard and looked at Chloe. "What should I do?" he asked.

"Emotion," she said. "Robots don't understand emotion. But they can and have been built to recognize emotion. On a minor matter such as this, you need to overload the emotion recognition factor.

"Merely identify the planet. Then stress not the justice of

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your claim but the anguish you've suffered. Make it extreme — paint a picture of the misery the error has already caused and will continue to cause. If you make it strong enough, the robot will set aside rational processes and grant the request."

IT BEGAN to be clear. As the government grew in size and complexity and contact with the governed parts became more tenuous, greater reliance had to be placed in logic, machinemade logic. But machines could not hope to encompass all the irrationality of Man. And irrational demands were apt to cause trouble. Pride was irrational, and so was the greater part of human misery.

Therefore, in minor matters, the government had provided a safety valve for irrational requests. Only in minor matters, men still decided important issues. But in the innumerable small decisions that had to be made daily, robots would set aside their logical process if a strong emotion were present.

"Pa," said Wilbur from the corner in which he had been squirming sleepily.

"Not now, Wilbur," growled Marcus. "I suppose you're hungry." In his mind he was composing the request. It was unlike anything he'd written.

"I think there's something in the kitchen," said Chloe, but Marcus hastily refused. Even on her salary she couldn't afford to serve eggs.

Mary Ellen came in just then. She slouched in dispiritedly, cloak drooping about her. "Hi, sis," she said as she opened the door.

Then she saw Marcus and revived abruptly. She flung herself across the room and into his lap, wrapping her arms around him. "Mark, dear," she said, smiling cattily over his head at her sister.

Marcus sighed regretfully. Heaven knew what the boy in his innocence would tell his mother. He worked himself loose from the girl's embrace and explained why he was here.

"Then we're going to Messy Row?"

"In a few months," said Chloe. "Marcus is setting up a perpetual fund to help those who can't pay their fare."

"Oh, I'll go," said Mary Ellen, looking steadily at Marcus. "But you needn't expect me to get married."

Marcus smiled to himself. She was dramatizing. When she found her choice wasn't limited she would scarcely remember him. There was, if Marcus now recalled correctly, a Joe Ainsworth, twenty-four or five. What made

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him seem older, when Marcus had first thought of him, was his prematurely gray hair. The two should be a perfect match. Chloe could not have Joe Ainsworth after all, but there'd be another for her.

"Please change, Mary Ellen," said Marcus. "We're going to dinner."

"All of us?"

"Certainly all of us," said Marcus dryly, noting her disapproval.

AS SHE left he began discussing with Chloe what he should say in the request. Apparently there were nuances he didn't understand because he still didn't have it settled to his satisfaction when Mary Ellen returned.

"I'm ready," she said, pirouetting for his approval.

She was ready, but not for a quiet little dinner. "I suggest a wrap for your shoulders," he said. She made a face, but went to get one.

"How long will it take to get this through?" he asked Chloe.

"Four to six years. There's a backlog."

"Four to six *years?*" he repeated incredulously. He began to see that the loophole the government had provided was very small indeed. Who would bother, even if he felt strongly about it, when he knew it would take so long?

"That's going through regular channels." Chloe frowned and smoothed her hair. "You may be very lucky though. Today, just today, we might find a much faster way. You said they are moving A-CELO?"

"They are," he said, hoping he knew what she meant. This was a golden opportunity that might never come again.

"Then they'll be busy through the night. A workman should have access to the master robot."

Marcus smiled. "I'm an excellent workman."

"You'll need me, too. You won't recognize what you're after."

"Granted. Is it dangerous?"

"Not physically. But there's a severe penalty for tampering with government property. There's an even heavier one for trying to get your case considered ahead of schedule."

He could see why this was so. He could also see that Chloe was the kind of person Messy Row needed. She knew what she was getting into, but didn't hesitate. "Then you should come with me. But stay in the background. Promise me you'll try to get away if I'm caught."

She shrugged. "If you're caught you'll need help on the outside."

Mary Ellen came back, a transparent shimmering wrap over her shoulders. She was blonde and

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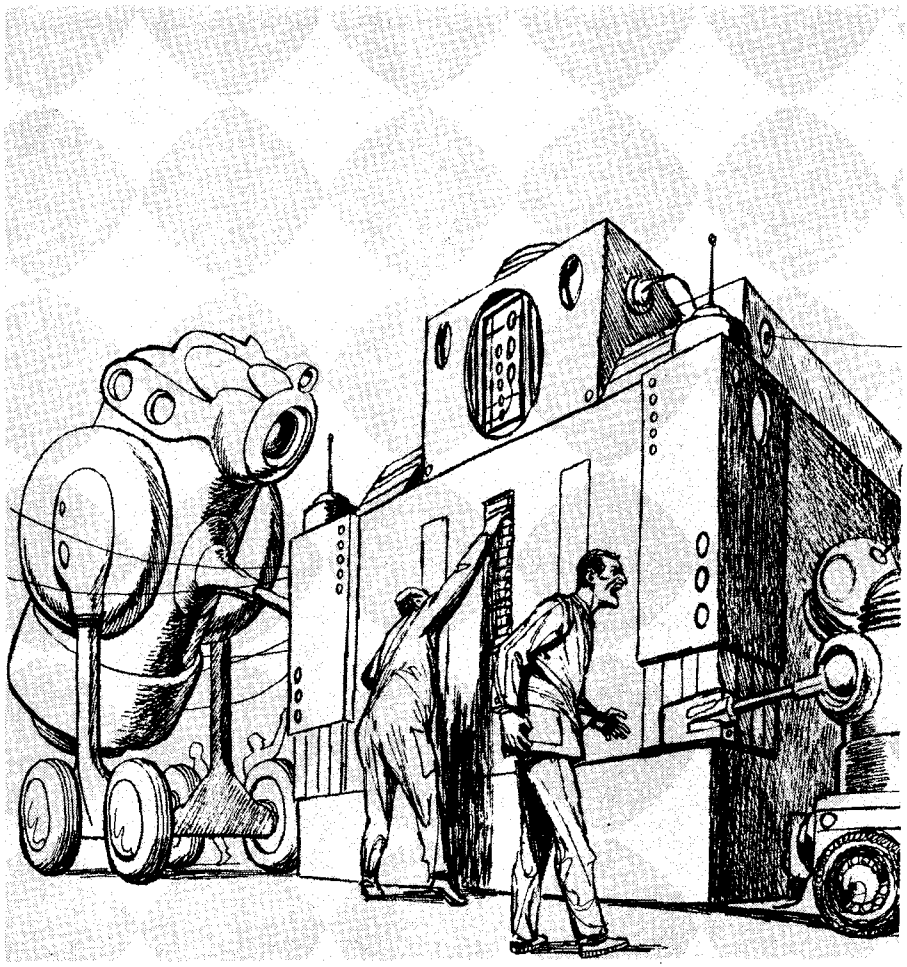
dazzling. "Where are we going? I'm so happy."

Marcus loosened his collar and sat down. "Dinner's off, except for you two. Chloe and I have work to do. Mary Ellen, take Wilbur back to the hotel for me. Watch after him."

"You want me to?" she asked despondently.

"I asked you to."

"Then I will." She arched her back, and it was a splendid arch. She swirled around, pausing at the door. "Come on, brat," she snarled.



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"Pa, I can get along —" said Wilbur. Marcus looked at him and he left with Mary Ellen.

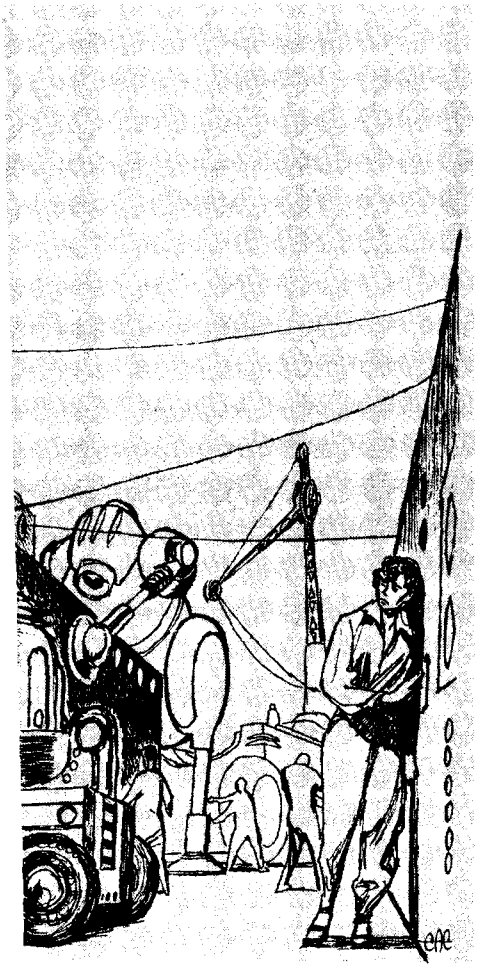
"We haven't much time," said Marcus when they were alone. "First we have to write the request. I'll need your help."

Chloe took the cover off a small machine in the corner. She sat down and turned toward him. "We have to emphasize anguish and suffering."

"Misery," suggested Marcus.

"Misery is a good strong word," she agreed. "It isn't used much lately. You should have this acted on in hours instead of years."

"It will be nice," said Marcus. "I can't think of any name as bad as Messy Row." Slowly he began to speak of the misery resulting from the error. Making corrections as they went, Chloe typed it on the tape.



MARCUS Mezzerow felt the weight of forty-three years roll away. He was tired, but it was relaxed tiredness that comes with achievement. It had been easy to walk into A-CELO and become part of the bustle and confusion. It had even been easy to locate the master robot that processed decisions on chart names. But the rest hadn't been easy even with Chloe to guide and counsel him.

The master robot was one of the last things to be moved. It was located deep in the sub-sub-basement, ordinarily inaccessible. It was a ponderous contrivance, awkward to move and quite delicate. Truck robots backed up to it and under it, lifting it up. Technicians and extra workmen swiftly began disconnecting it from

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the building. Marcus was one of those extra workmen and he did his job as well as the others. But he didn't get an opportunity to insert his request in the machine.

Chloe sauntered past in shapeless work clothes, winking as she went by. She attracted no attention because there were many women around. Marcus got ready, moving to the front of the machine, feeling the spool in his pocket. A technician stared suspiciously at him, but there wasn't anything definite to object to.

Chloe leaned against the wall, moving the switch next to her with her elbow. Immediately standby circuits cut in, but the flicker of lights caused a commotion. The technician next to Marcus whirled, shouting at Chloe who looked startled and tired. The tiredness was real.

In the few free seconds he had, Marcus put the spool in the machine close to the top. It jammed the remaining spools closer together, but the machine was built to compensate for overloads. There should be no trouble from this.

The spool itself was another thing Chloe had helped him with. Normally requests were received on paper and had to be transcribed. She had enabled him to bypass one stage altogether.

They worked on after the shouting episode. At the first rest break they walked up to the street level, pausing in a dimly lighted hall to strip off their outer work clothing which they disposed of. They were no longer workmen. They were pedestrians who had passed by and wandered in to see what was happening. They didn't belong in the building and were told to leave, which they did.

And so it was late when Marcus entered the hotel. There was no one around, for which he was thankful. He didn't feel like fending off women at this hour of the morning. He went up and let himself in quietly. Wilbur was asleep in the adjoining room and the door between them was open. He closed it before turning on the light, which he adjusted to the lowest level. Perhaps by this time the master chart robot was in a new location, grinding out decisions. Messy Row was or soon would be a thing of the past.

"Pa," Wilbur called as Marcus removed a shoe.

"Yes. I'm back. Go to sleep."

"Did you get it done?"

"It's finished. We're taking the next ship out."

"Tomorrow?"

"If there's one scheduled tomorrow."

"Before we say good-by?"

Marcus could hear the bed rustle as Wilbur sat up. "We'll send them a note. Anyway they'll

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be on Mezzerow in a few months."

THE door opened and Wilbur stood there, his face white and his eyes round and serious. "But I gotta say good-by to Mary Ellen."

Marcus took off the other shoe. He should have known not to leave them alone. His only excuse was that he had been thinking of other things. "I thought you didn't like her," he said.

"Pa, that was because I thought she didn't like me," said Wilbur. "But she does. I mean —" He leaned heavily against the doorway and his face was long and sad.

Marcus smiled in the near darkness. The boy had been around girls so seldom he didn't know how they behaved. He had mistaken a normal reaction to the opposite sex for something more. Nevertheless it had worked out nicely. Wilbur would not remember who it was that Mary Ellen had really pursued. With the feverish egotism of youth he would retain only the memory of the interest she'd shown in him. A kiss would haunt him for years. "Am I to understand you made love to her?" he asked sternly, amused at his own inaccuracy.

"Oh, Pa," said Wilbur. "I kissed her."

"These affairs pass away."

"I still gotta say good-by," said Wilbur.

"We'll see," said Marcus. Not if he could help it, would they. It would be a terrible thing if, on parting, Mary Ellen would throw her arms around him, ignoring Wilbur. She was too young to understand what it might mean to someone even younger than herself. Marcus went to sleep with the satisfaction of a man who is in full control of destiny.

In the morning there was no need for subterfuge. A ship was going near Mezzerow. Not directly to it, the planet wasn't that important. But it was merely a short local hop from one of the planets on the schedule. Mezzerow. After all these years he could call it by the rightful name without feeling provincial.

The excitement of the return trip shook Wilbur out of his preoccupation with Mary Ellen. Marcus packed and had the luggage zipped to the space port. He called Chloe and completed the financial arrangements and left a message for her sister who was at work.

And then they were at the port, entering the ship. There was a short wait before takeoff. They settled in the cabin and Wilbur promptly went to sleep. Food, sleep, girls; it was all a young man had time for.

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But Marcus couldn't rest though he was tired. He wanted to hear the schedule announced. By this time the correction should have been made. The rockets started, throbbing softly as the tubes warmed up. Wilbur awakened with a start, sitting on the edge of the acceleration diaphragm. "Do you think they'll announce it?" he asked.

"I think so," said Marcus. The Universe would know that it was Mezzerow.

The rockets throbbed higher; the cabin shook. Weren't they going to call the schedule? The intercom in the cabin rasped.

They were. "Bessemer, Coarsegold," said the speaker.

"Get on the acceleration couch," said Marcus as he did so himself.

"Noreen, Cassalmont," the speaker droned. But now there was too much interference from the rockets. The thrust pressed Marcus deep into the flexible diaphragm. The announcer shouted, but the blood was roaring in his ears.

Marcus felt himself sliding into the gray world of takeoff.

THEN they were out among the stars and the sensation of great weight rolled away. Marcus sat up.

"We didn't hear it," said Wilbur, swinging his legs.

"We didn't. But they announced it."

"I wish I'd heard," said Wilbur.

It was bothering Marcus, too. "The thing to do is to find out," he said. They went into the corridor. The rockets were silent; the star drive had taken over. The solar system was behind them, indistinguishable from the other stars.

The pilot was busy and nodded his head, asking them to wait while he set the controls. He flipped levers and after an interval turned around. "Can I help you?" he asked.

"We didn't hear the schedule," said Marcus. "The rockets were too loud."

The pilot smiled apologetically. "You know how it is — last minute corrections on the charts. We had to wait until new ones were delivered, just before takeoff."

The oppression that had been hovering near lifted a little. "I understand," said Marcus. "Would you tell me if Mezzerow was one of the corrections?"

The pilot turned to the list and ran his finger down the line. He looked and looked again. "No Mezzerow here," he said.

The oppression had never been far away. It came back. "No Mezzerow?" said Marcus bleakly.

"No, but I'll check." The pilot bent over the list. "Wait. Maybe

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this is why I didn't see it. Take a look."

Marcus looked where the pilot was pointing. Above the fingernail, in bold black letters, was the name.

> MISERY ROW (Formerly Mezzerow — changed to avoid confusion with a family name.)

"Thanks," said Marcus faintly. "That's what I wanted to know."

They went to the cabin in silence. Marcus closed his eyes but that didn't shut out the new name. Nothing could.

"That's not as nice as it was," said Wilbur. "What do you suppose was wrong?"

"I don't know," said Marcus. But he did know. Fourteen times, or was it eleven, he had used one word. He had tried to overload the master robot with emotion and he had succeeded.

He had given it one outstanding impression: Misery.

"What'll we do?" said Wilbur. "Go back and change it?"

"No," said Marcus. "We'll leave it as it is. When you grow up and take my place, you can try your hand at it if you want."

Women would get there regardless of what it was called. Chloe would realize what had happened and anyway he'd write. She'd see that they got to the right place. And with women for the men who wanted to settle, they'd get along.

Besides, there was the element of uncertainty. He had thought nothing could be quite as bad as the old name . . . until this. He shuddered to think what the next change might be like.

"Will it be all right?" asked Wilbur anxiously.

"It has to be all right," said Marcus, his voice strong with resignation. "We're going home to Misery Row."

—F. L. WALLACE

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Death Wish

By NED LANG

Compared with a spaceship in distress, going to hell in a handbasket is roomy and slow!

THE space freighter *Queen Dierdre* was a great, squat, pockmarked vessel of the Earth-Mars run and she never gave anyone a bit of trouble. That should have been sufficient warning to Mr. Watkins, her engineer. Watkins was fond of saying that there are two kinds of equipment—the kind that fails bit by bit, and the kind that fails all at once.

Watkins was short and red-faced, magnificently mustached, and always a little out of breath. With a cigar in his hand, over a glass of beer, he talked most cynically about his ship, in the immemorial fashion of engineers. But in reality, Watkins was foolishly infatuated with *Dierdre*, idealized her, humanized her, and couldn't conceive of anything serious ever happening.

On this particular run, *Dierdre* soared away from Terra at the proper speed; Mr. Watkins signaled that fuel was being consumed at the proper rate; and Captain Somers cut the engines

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at the proper moment indicated by Mr. Rajcik, the navigator.

As soon as Point Able had been reached and the engines stopped, Somers frowned and studied his complex control board. He was a thin and meticulous man, and he operated his ship with mechanical perfection. He was well liked in the front offices of Mikkelsen Space Lines, where Old Man Mikkelsen pointed to Captain Somers' reports as models of neatness and efficiency. On Mars, he stayed at the Officers Club, eschewing the stews and dives of Marsport. On Earth, he lived in a little Vermont cottage and enjoyed the quiet companionship of two cats, a Japanese houseboy, and a wife.

HIS instructions read true. And yet he sensed something wrong. Somers knew every creak, rattle and groan that *Dierdre* was capable of making. During blastoff, he had heard something *different*. In space, something different had to be wrong.

"Mr. Rajcik," he said, turning to his navigator, "would you check the cargo? I believe something may have shifted."

"You bet," Rajcik said cheerfully. He was an almost offensively handsome young man with black wavy hair, blasé blue eyes and a cleft chin. Despite his appearance, Rajcik was thoroughly qualified for his position. But he was only one of fifty thousand thoroughly qualified men who lusted for a berth on one of the fourteen spaceships in existence. Only Stephen Rajcik had had the foresight, appearance and fortitude to court and wed Helga, Old Man Mikkelsen's eldest daughter.

Rajcik went aft to the cargo hold. *Dierdre* was carrying transistors this time, and microfilm books, platinum filaments, salamis, and other items that could not as yet be produced on Mars. But the bulk of her space was taken by the immense Fahrensen Computer.

Rajcik checked the positioning lines on the monster, examined the stays and turnbuckles that held it in place, and returned to the cabin.

"All in order, Boss," he reported to Captain Somers, with the smile that only an employer's son-in-law can both manage and afford.

"Mr. Watkins, do you read anything?"

Watkins was at his own instrument panel. "Not a thing, sir. I'll vouch for every bit of equipment in *Dierdre*."

"Very well. How long before we reach Point Baker?"

"Three minutes, Chief," Rajcik said.

"Good."

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The spaceship hung in the void, all sensation of speed lost for lack of a reference point. Beyond the portholes was darkness, the true color of the Universe, perforated by the brilliant lost points of the stars.

Captain Somers turned away from the disturbing reminder of his extreme finitude and wondered if he could land *Dierdre* without shifting the computer. It was by far the largest, heaviest and most delicate piece of equipment ever transported in space.

He worried about that machine. Its value ran into the billions of dollars, for Mars Colony had ordered the best possible, a machine whose utility would offset the immense transportation charge across space. As a result, the Fahrensen Computer was perhaps the most complex and advanced machine ever built by Man.

"Ten seconds to Point Baker," Rajcik announced.

"Very well." Somers readied himself at the control board.

"Four — three —two — one —fire!"

SOMERS activated the engines. Acceleration pressed the three men back into their couches, and more acceleration, and — shockingly — still more acceleration.

"The fuel!" Watkins yelped, watching his indicators spinning.

"The course!" Rajcik gasped, fighting for breath.

Captain Somers cut the engine switch. The engines continued firing, pressing the men deeper into their couches. The cabin lights flickered, went out, came on again.

And still the acceleration mounted and *Dierdre's* engines howled in agony, thrusting the ship forward. Somers raised one leaden hand and inched it toward the emergency cut-off switch. With a fantastic expenditure of energy, he reached the switch, depressed it.

The engines stopped with dramatic suddenness, while tortured metal creaked and groaned. The lights flickered rapidly, as though *Dierdre* were blinking in pain. They steadied and then there was silence.

Watkins hurried to the engine room. He returned morosely.

"Of all the damn things," he muttered.

"What was it?" Captain Somers asked.

"Main firing circuit. It fused on us." He shook his head. "Metal fatigue, I'd say. It must have been flawed for years."

"When was it last checked out?"

"Well, it's a sealed unit. Supposed to outlast the ship. Absolutely foolproof, unless—"

"Unless it's flawed."

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"Don't blame it on me! Those circuits are supposed to be X-rayed, heat-treated, fluoroscoped — you just can't trust machinery!"

At last Watkins believed that engineering axiom.

"How are we on fuel?" Captain Somers asked.

"Not enough left to push a kiddy car down Main Street," Watkins said gloomily. "If I could get my hands on that factory inspector . . ."

Captain Somers turned to Rajcik, who was seated at the navigator's desk, hunched over his charts. "How does this affect our course?"

Rajcik finished the computation he was working on and gnawed thoughtfully at his pencil.

"It kills us. We're going to cross the orbit of Mars before Mars gets there."

"How long before?'

"Too long. Captain, we're flying out of the Solar System like the proverbial bat out of hell."

RAJCIK smiled, a courageous, devil-may-care smile which Watkins found singularly inappropriate.

"Damn it, man," he roared, "don't just leave it there. We've got a little fuel left. We can turn her, can't we? You *are* a navigator, aren't you?"

"I am," Rajcik said icily. "And if I computed my courses the way you maintain your engines, we'd be plowing through Australia now."

"Why, you little company toady! At least I got my job legitimately, not by marrying—"

"That's enough!" Captain Somers cut in.

Watkins, his face a mottled red, his mustache bristling, looked like a walrus about to charge. And Rajcik, eyes glittering, was waiting hopefully.

"No more of this," Somers said. "I give the orders here."

"Then give some!" Watkins snapped. "Tell him to plot a return curve. This is life or death!"

"All the more reason for remaining cool. Mr. Rajcik, can you plot such a course?"

"First thing I tried," Rajcik said. "Not a chance, on the fuel we have left. We can turn a degree or two, but it won't help."

Watkins said, "Of course it will! We'll curve back into the Solar System!"

"Sure, but the best curve we can make will take a few thousand years for us to complete."

"Perhaps a landfall on some other planet — Neptune, Uranus—"

Rajcik shook his head. "Even if an outer planet were in the right place at the right time, we'd need fuel—a lot of fuel—to get

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into a braking orbit. And if we could, who'd come get us? No ship has gone past Mars yet."

"At least we'd have a chance," Watkins said.

"Maybe," Rajcik agreed indifferently. "But we can't swing it. I'm afraid you'll have to kiss the Solar System good-by."

Captain Somers wiped his forehead and tried to think of a plan. He found it difficult to concentrate. There was too great a discrepancy between his knowledge of the situation and its appearance. He knew—intellectually—that his ship was traveling out of the Solar System at a tremendous rate of speed. But in appearance they were stationary, hung in the abyss, three men trapped in a small, hot room, breathing the smell of hot metal and perspiration.

"What shall we do, Captain?" Watkins asked.

SOMERS frowned at the engineer. Did the man expect him to pull a solution out of the air? How was he even supposed to concentrate on the problem? He had to slow the ship, turn it. But his senses told him that the ship was not moving. How, then, could speed constitute a problem?

He couldn't help but feel that the real problem was to get away from these high-strung, squabbling men, to escape from this hot, smelly little room.

"Captain! You must have some *idea!*"

Somers tried to shake his feeling of unreality. The problem, the real problem, he told himself, was how to stop the ship.

He looked around the fixed cabin and out the porthole at the unmoving stars. *We are moving very rapidly*, he thought, unconvinced.

Rajcik said disgustedly, "Our noble captain can't face the situation."

"Of course I can," Somers objected, feeling very light-headed and unreal. "I can pilot any course you lay down. That's my only real responsibility. Plot us a course to Mars!"

"Sure!" Rajcik said, laughing. "I can! I will! Engineer, I'm going to need plenty of fuel for this course—about ten tons! See that I get it!"

"Right you are," said Watkins. "Captain, I'd like to put in a requisition for ten tons of fuel."

"Requisition granted," Somers said. "All right, gentlemen, responsibility is inevitably circular. Let's get a grip on ourselves. Mr. Rajcik, suppose you radio Mars."

When contact had been established, Somers took the microphone and stated their situation. The company official at the other end seemed to have trouble grasping it.

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"But can't you turn the ship?" he asked bewilderedly. "Any kind of an orbit—"

"No. I've just explained that."

"Then what do you propose to do, Captain?"

"That's exactly what I'm asking you."

There was a babble of voices from the loudspeaker, punctuated by bursts of static. The lights flickered and reception began to fade. Rajcik, working frantically, managed to re-establish the contact.

"Captain," the official on Mars said, "we can't think of a thing. If you could swing into any sort of an orbit—"

"I can't!"

"Under the circumstances, you have the right to try anything at all. Anything, Captain!"

Somers groaned. "Listen, I can think of just one thing. We could bail out in spacesuits as near Mars as possible. Link ourselves together, take the portable transmitter. It wouldn't give much of a signal, but you'd know our approximate position. Everything would have to be figured pretty closely — those suits just carry twelve hours' air — but it's a chance."

THERE was a confusion of voices from the other end. Then the official said, "I'm sorry, Captain."

"What? I'm telling you it's our one chance!"

"Captain, the only ship on Mars now is the *Diana*. Her engines are being overhauled."

"How long before she can be spaceborne?"

"Three weeks, at least. And a ship from Earth would take too long. Captain, I wish we could think of something. About the only thing we can suggest—"

The reception suddenly failed again.

Rajcik cursed frustratedly as he worked over the radio. Watkins gnawed at his mustache. Somers glanced out a porthole and looked hurriedly away, for the stars, their destination, were impossibly distant.

They heard static again, faintly now.

"I can't get much more," Rajcik said. "This damned reception . . . What could they have been suggesting?"

"Whatever it was," said Watkins, "they didn't think it would work."

"What the hell does that matter?" Rajcik asked, annoyed. "It'd give us something to do."

They heard the official's voice, a whisper across space.

"Can you hear . . . Suggest . . ."

At full amplification, the voice faded, then returned. "Can only suggest . . . most unlikely . . . but try . . . calculator . . . try . . ."

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The voice was gone. And then even the static was gone.

"That does it," Rajcik said. "The calculator? Did he mean the Fahrensen Computer in our hold?"

"I see what he meant," said Captain Somers. "The Fahrensen is a very advanced job. No one knows the limits of its potential. He suggests we present our problem to it."

"That's ridiculous," Watkins snorted. "This problem has no solution."

"It doesn't seem to," Somers agreed. "But the big computers have solved other apparently impossible problems. We can't lose anything by trying."

"No," said Rajcik, "as long as we don't pin any hopes on it."

"That's right. We don't dare hope. Mr. Watkins, I believe this is your department."

"Oh, what's the use?" Watkins asked. "You say don't hope—but both of you are hoping anyhow! You think the big electronic god is going to save your lives. Well, it's not!"

"We have to try," Somers told him.

"We don't! I wouldn't give it the satisfaction of turning us down!"

THEY stared at him in vacant astonishment.

"Now you're implying that machines think," said Rajcik.

"Of course I am," Watkins said. "Because they do! No, I'm not out of my head. Any engineer will tell you that a complex machine has a personality all its own. Do you know what that personality is like? Cold, withdrawn, uncaring, unfeeling. A machine's only purpose is to frustrate desire and produce two problems for every one it solves. And do you know why a machine feels this way?"

"You're hysterical," Somers told him.

"I am not. A machine feels this way because it *knows* it is an unnatural creation in nature's domain. Therefore it wishes to reach entropy and cease — a mechanical death wish."

"I've never heard such gibberish in my life," Somers said. "Are you going to hook up that computer?"

"Of course. I'm a human. I keep trying. I just wanted you to understand *fully* that there is no hope." He went to the cargo hold.

After he had gone, Rajcik grinned and shook his head. "We'd better watch him."

"He'll be all right," Somers said.

"Maybe, maybe not." Rajcik pursed his lips thoughtfully. "He's blaming the situation on a machine personality now, trying to absolve himself of guilt. And it *is* his fault that we're in this spot.

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An engineer is responsible for all equipment."

"I don't believe you can put the blame on him so dogmatically," Somers replied.

"Sure I can," Rajcik said. "I personally don't care, though. This is as good a way to die as any other and better than most."

Captain Somers wiped perspiration from his face. Again the notion came to him that the problem — the *real* problem — was to find a way out of this hot, smelly, motionless little box.

Rajcik said, "Death in space is an appealing idea, in certain ways. Imagine an entire spaceship for your tomb! And you have a variety of ways of actually dying. Thirst and starvation I rule out as unimaginative. But there are possibilities in heat, cold, implosion, explosion—"

"This is pretty morbid," Somers said.

"I'M A pretty morbid fellow," Rajcik said carelessly. "But at least I'm not blaming inanimate objects, the way Watkins is. Or permitting myself the luxury of shock, like you." He studied Somers' face. "This is your first real emergency, isn't it, Captain?"

"I suppose so," Somers answered vaguely.

"And you're responding to it like a stunned ox," Rajcik said. "Wake up, Captain! If you can't live with joy, at least try to extract some pleasure from your dying."

"Shut up," Somers said, with no heat. "Why don't you read a book or something?"

"I've read all the books on board. I have nothing to distract me except an analysis of your character."

Watkins returned to the cabin. "Well, I've activated your big electronic god. Would anyone care to make a burned offering in front of it?"

"Have you given it the problem?"

"Not yet. I decided to confer with the high priest. What shall I request of the demon, sir?"

"Give it all the data you can," Somers said. "Fuel, oxygen, water, food — that sort of thing. Then tell it we want to return to Earth. Alive," he added

"It'll love that," Watkins said. "It'll get such pleasure out of rejecting our problem as unsolvable. Or better yet — insufficient data. In that way, it can hint that a solution is possible, but just outside our reach. It can keep us hoping."

Somers and Rajcik followed him to the cargo hold. The computer, activated now, hummed softly. Lights flashed swiftly over its panels, blue and white and red.

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Watkins punched buttons and turned dials for fifteen minutes, then moved back.

"Watch for the red light on top," he said. "That means the problem is rejected."

"Don't say it," Rajcik warned quickly.

Watkins laughed. "Superstitious little fellow, aren't you?"

"But not incompetent," Rajcik said, smiling.

"Can't you two quit it?" Somers demanded, and both men turned startedly to face him.

"Behold!" Rajcik said. "The sleeper has awakened."

"After a fashion," said Watkins, snickering.

Somers suddenly felt that if death or rescue did not come quickly, they would kill each other, or drive each other crazy.

"Look!" Rajcik said.

A LIGHT on the computer's panel was flashing green.

"Must be a mistake," said Watkins. "Green means the problem is solvable within the conditions set down."

"Solvable!" Rajcik said.

"But it's impossible," Watkins argued. "It's fooling us, leading us on—"

"Don't be superstitious," Rajcik mocked. "How soon do we get the solution?"

"It's coming now." Watkins pointed to a paper tape inching out of a slot in the machine's face. "But there must be something wrong!"

They watched as, millimeter by millimeter, the tape crept out. The computer hummed, its lights flashing green. Then the hum stopped. The green lights blazed once more and faded.

"What happened?" Rajcik wanted to know.

"It's finished," Watkins said.

"Pick it up! Read it!"

"You read it. You won't get *me* to play its game."

Rajcik laughed nervously and rubbed his hands together, but didn't move. Both men turned to Somers.

"Captain, it's your responsibility."

"Go ahead, Captain!"

Somers looked with loathing at his engineer and navigator. *His* responsibility, everything was *his* responsibility. Would they never leave him alone?

He went up to the machine, pulled the tape free, read it with slow deliberation.

"What does it say, sir?" Rajcik asked.

"Is it — possible?" Watkins urged.

"Oh, yes," Somers said. "It's possible." He laughed and looked around at the hot, smelly, low-ceilinged little room with its locked doors and windows.

"What is it?" Rajcik shouted.

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SOMERS said, "You figured a few thousand years to return to the Solar System, Rajcik? Well, the computer agrees with you. Twenty-three hundred years, to be precise. Therefore, it has given us a suitable longevity serum."

"Twenty-three hundred years," Rajcik mumbled. "I suppose we hibernate or something of the sort."

"Not at all," Somers said calmly. "As a matter of fact, this serum does away quite nicely with the need for sleep. We stay awake and watch each other."

The three men looked at one another and at the sickeningly familiar room smelling of metal and perspiration, its sealed doors and windows that stared at an unchanging spectacle of stars.

Watkins said, "Yes, that's the sort of thing it would do."

—NED LANG

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

FORECAST

Like automobile batteries, every writer periodically seems to need time to recharge. That explains the appearance and disappearance of well-loved names, in case you were puzzled. There's nothing even faintly amusing about the process. When it happens, it is a catastrophe to the writer and another source of anguish to the editor. The feeling — well, this is a personal affidavit stating that the only thing like it is having the nurse walk out of the room and forget to remove the needle after you've been given a transfusion. No matter how often you go through it, you always feel that this is the final one — you'll never get another idea again; even if you did, you couldn't put it down on paper; or if you wrote it, the story would be awful.

Fortunately for us, though, all authors do eventually get their creative batteries recharged; it's just a matter of storing up power. And when that happens—

Well, Clifford D. Simak returns next month with DROP DEAD, a powerhouse of a novelet about a perfect world, so peaceful and accommodating that nothing short of Paradise can compete with it. But how it got that way is only slightly less ghastly than how it manages to stay that way!

And Theodore Sturgeon comes streaking back with THE SKILLS OF XANADU, a meteoric novelet which refuses to be satisfied with the proposition that when a malignant world endangers another, surgery is the only answer. Instead, it comes up with an alternative solution — maybe the malignancy can be killed with kindness!

But the best news of all . . . both authors are back in full production again, sparking away more dazzlingly than ever . . . and you'll see them often in these glad pages!

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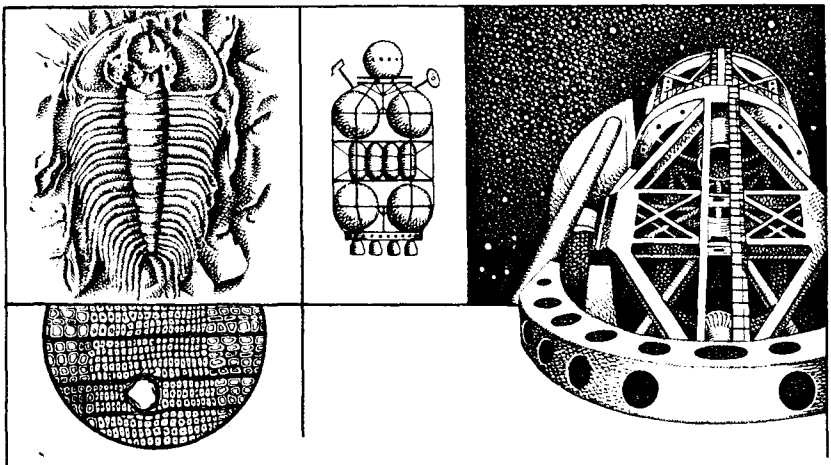
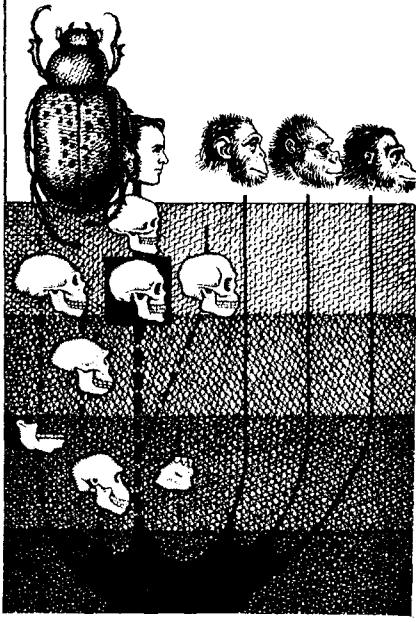


for your information

By WILLY LEY



MUTANT OF THE IRON HORSE

IN THE days of the Second World War, when every old ax blade and every rusty girder suddenly acquired importance as scrap steel, the English dismantled an interesting structure located some ten miles from Glasgow. Just a few years later, immediately after the end of the war, British Army engineers

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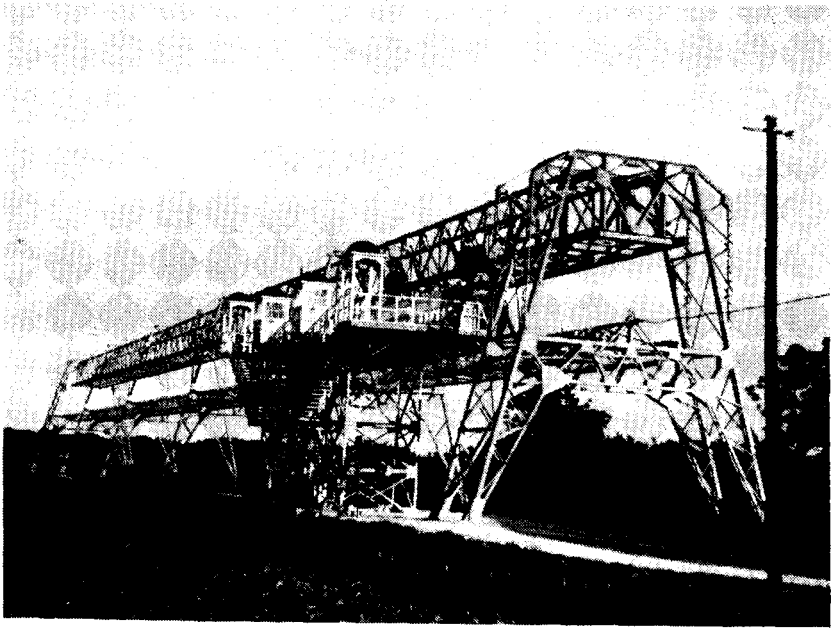

George Bennie's experimental monorail track with station, photographed in 1930

worked hard and with top priority on the repair of a bomb-damaged structure of almost the same kind in a city in West Germany in the British Zone of Occupation.

Both the structure that was dismantled in England and the one that was repaired in Germany were monorail tracks, the only ones in the world. They were not completely alike, but the main difference was not one of construction.

The most important difference was that the one in England was experimental and had been built for purposes of testing and demonstration, while the one in Germany was and is a hard-working part of the city's public transportation system, the city being Elberfeld-Barmen. It has been ever since it was built in 1900 and its history, except for the bomb damage sustained during the Second World War, is happily devoid of any dramatic incident. It simply worked from the first day on and, through all these years, it was a unique offshoot of the iron horse. There was no other like it.

But it is quite probable that

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one day in the future, the passenger-carrying monorail of Elberfeld - Barmen will not be unique any more. It will then be the oldest example of a special and very useful means of transportation. And it is also likely that the newer examples will owe their existence and usefulness to a premeditated disregard of the principles that guided the design and construction of the first.

I THINK the story will emerge best when told in proper chronological order. The city of Elberfeld-Barmen was originally two cities, Elberfeld and Barmen, both situated some distance apart on the banks of a fairly small river, the Wupper, which is a tributary of the Rhine River. The valley of the Wupper River was in the center of what was to become one of the most heavily industrialized sections of all Europe.

Even before the turn of the century, the traffic situation of the whole area had become very nearly unmanageable. And the neighboring cities of Elberfeld and Barmen were in an especially difficult spot. As almost always happens—nobody knows why—people living in one city had jobs in the other. Local traffic was heavy and, in addition to the local traffic, there was a good deal of through traffic.

In both cities, the streets were generally old and rather narrow and by no means straight. The Imperial Railroad bought what rights of way it needed and, in time, took care of much of the through traffic. The local traffic problem still remained to be solved.

An engineer from Cologne, by the name of Eugen Langen, pointed out to the harassed city officials of both cities that there was something that might be called open space between the two cities, namely the Wupper River. One might build an elevated railroad running over the river, without hampering the river traffic itself.

Eugen Langen probably was not the first to think of this, but if others had harbored the same idea before him, they had given up, for the river does not happen to be very straight, either. No elevated railroad, if circumstances forced it to stay over the river, could follow all its twists and turns and run at a speed faster than a brisk walk. The answer, presented by Langen, was a type of railroad which could follow the twists and bends and still run at a reasonable speed.

He evolved a structure resembling a steel-girder bridge running the length of the river, with supports looking like inverted "V"s, planted into the banks of the river. This structure supported

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two single rails and the trains were suspended from these rails. Each car hung from so-called bogies and each bogie had two wheels, one behind the other, which rested on the single rails. In each bogie, the front wheel was the driving wheel with an electric motor, while the second wheel merely trailed. The current for the driving wheels was furnished in the same manner as for any other electric train.

Naturally, a car hanging from bogies could take rather sharp turns fairly fast in perfect safety. The name given to the new device was *Schwebebahn*, which might be translated nearly literally as "levitated railroad," but is usually referred to in English engineering literature as the Wuppertal Monorail.

SOME twenty-five years after its completion, somebody wrote a paper proving conclusively that the structure must be unsafe, since it should collapse under its own weight. At the time this was written, the *Schwebebahn* had a record of having handled 4200 passengers per hour in each direction ever since it was opened to the public. It obviously was far less unsafe than the critic had calculated. Whoever was in charge then modified operations somewhat, however. Instead of three-car trains, which had been customary, the Monorail ran only two-car trains, but more of them.

Since the stations are spaced rather closely together, the speed of this monorail is never very high. Its function, and consequently its speed, might best be compared to a fairly fast streetcar line operating under ideal traffic conditions, with nobody else ever getting in the way.

The Wuppertal Monorail has shown that such a transportation system has definite advantages in crowded areas because it can provide urban mass transportation without taking up any space on the ground worth mentioning. It is with just this thought in mind that there have been sporadic studies of a monorail project for southern California.

This monorail, if built, would be a suburban rapid transit — let's say *fairly* rapid—line running from the center of Los Angeles to Van Nuys in the San Fernando Valley, a distance of 18 miles. Instead of following a river, the San Fernando Valley Monorail would follow a proposed freeway and it would look different for this reason. Instead of being supported by inverted "V"s, the rails would be supported by T-shaped girders which would be imbedded in the center-park strip of the freeway.

As in the example of the Wuppertal Monorail, the San Fernan-

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do Valley Monorail is to have electric drive and the cars are to be suspended from two bogies apiece, each bogie with two wheels. But in the new proposal, every bogie wheel is supposed to be a driving wheel, equipped with an electric motor of 55 horsepower, which would result in a maximum speed (this is purely a coincidence of figures) of 55 m.p.h. No higher speeds are possible under the circumstances because of economic spacing of the stations.

For the sake of passengers, especially standees, acceleration and deceleration of the cars must not surpass a maximum of six feet per second squared, and this would imply a spacing of stations a minimum of 5 miles apart if one wanted to reach 100 m.p.h. between stations.

The most important talking point of the advocates of monorail systems is, of course, safety, for which the Wuppertal Monorail has produced a most impressive record.

A suspended monorail cannot be derailed except by difficult and highly ingenious sabotage. The rails cannot possibly be flooded. No snow can accumulate on the rails, although this consideration, of course, does not apply to sunny California. No driver, however reckless or careless, can stall his car on the track.

The second talking point is that, in this particular case, where a rapid transit line has to be built in a heavily populated area, a monorail would be cheaper than a surface railroad.

IN AUGUST, 1947, the Metropolitan Traffic and Transit Committee of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce completed a study of what it would cost to build a double-track surface railroad in the center of the freeway. This, of course, meant widening the freeway and buying some right-of-way for the purpose. The final figure read that this double track railroad would cost $1,165,000 per mile.

But that was only for the widened freeway and the roadbed. There would be additional expenses for tracks, stations, signal systems and, naturally, the trains themselves.

The monorail along the same route would cost $834,000 per mile, including structures, signal system, car yard, repair shops and eight intermediate stations. This figure of $834,000 per mile included everything but the cost of the terminal station and the price of the rolling stock.

Interesting — but how about that other monorail structure the English used up for scrap during the Second World War?

Well, that one, though also a

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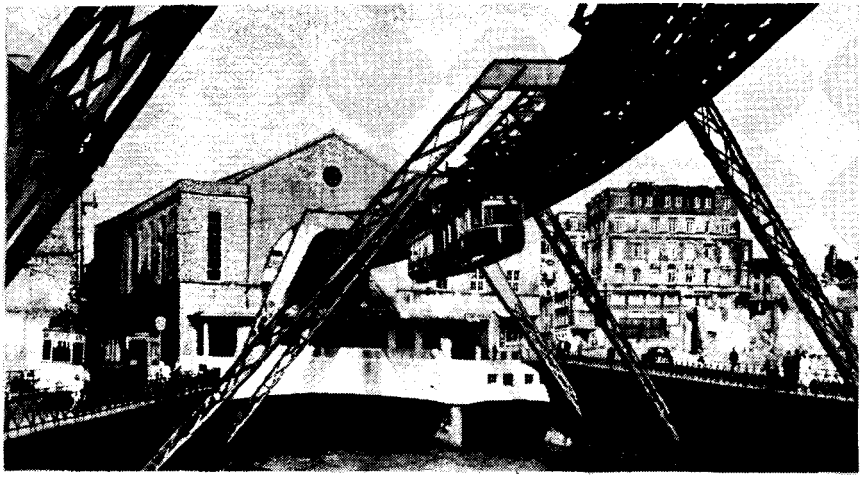

The Döppersberg station of the Wuppertal monorail in Elberfeld

monorail, is something from an entirely different chapter of the same book, maybe even a chapter from a different book. To understand it, we have to go back to early entries in the story of the iron horse.

When the first locomotives were in what would now be called the planning stage, a few people who had learned mathematics severely lectured the inventors on their lack of mathematical knowledge.

A rail, they said, is a straight line. A wheel is a circle. A locomotive wheel on a rail is, mathematically speaking, a circle and a tangent. As everybody knows, a circle and a tangent touch in *just one point.* Therefore no car could possibly be moved by applying force to its wheels. Since wheel and track touched in one point only, there could not possibly be enough friction to move the vehicle. The wheel, in all probability, would merely spin.

A few inventors took this information to heart and came up with "designs" in which the wheels were cogwheels fitting a notched rail—or else in which all wheels were all freely spinning and the motion was to be accomplished by pushing rods engaging either the cross ties of the tracks or else the ground directly.

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The latter type had imitation horse feet at the end of the push rods! But some people just built locomotives and found out that, tangent to the circle notwithstanding, they got enough traction not only to move the locomotive but to make it pull a train, too.

FROM then on, traction on the rails was taken for granted and the railroads grew rapidly, in numbers, size and in weight. As a matter of fact, they grew too much in weight. Rolling stock was built to last and if it grew heavy in the process, well, that was the way things were. Around 1900, a good solidly built passenger car in which every seat was occupied weighed just three per cent more than the same car without any passengers!

Two-car train of the Wuppertal Monorail traveling over the Wupper River

Every once in a while, somebody noticed this obvious inefficiency and made suggestions for lightweight trains. He was then either told that durability was the most important consideration or was suspected of being a camouflaged salesman for an aluminum company. Only recently have lightweight trains actually appeared on the scene, but they are still rare.

In the meantime, imaginative engineers had gone a step further in their reasoning. Except for heavy freight engines, where their great weight was useful when it came to traction, there was no need or reason for inefficient overweight in rolling stock. One should, therefore, use all the tricks of the trade to lighten the cars. It would then, obviously, take much less power to move a car. And with lessened power requirements, one could think of engines other than the steam engine.

Moreover, why rely on traction of turning wheels? Airplanes moving around on the ground moved on wheels, but no wheel traction was involved. Why not investi-

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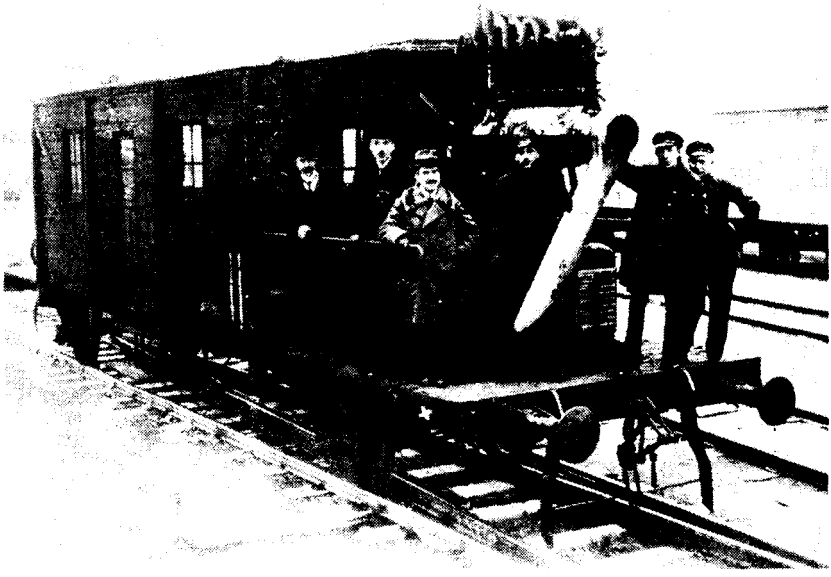

The first propeller-driven railroad car in history—Berlin, 1919

gate whether an airplane propeller might not furnish the motive power for wheeled vehicles, too?

It turned out after the First World War that several engineers had secretly toyed with this idea for years. But it also turned out that the first propeller-driven railroad car had been built in a most unprofessional manner.

The year was 1917 and the place was Palestine. A contingent of German soldiers stationed there found the climate too warm for their taste, but fortunately the shore of the Mediterranean Sea was only a little more than a mile away. Unfortunately, however, they had to walk that mile, though there was a railroad track. There also was a flatcar but no locomotive.

Then somebody looked speculatively at a wrecked airplane. Its propeller was undamaged, its engine in running condition. No harm in taking the engine out of the wrecked plane and mounting it on the flatcar. Maybe it would work.

It did.

Without knowing about this

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example, a German scientist who had been in charge of propeller production and testing (for airships) through the war advocated, in 1918, that available railroad cars and available aircraft engines should be put together as emergency propeller-driven railroads. The scientist was Dr. Otto Steinitz, who had devoted some spare time to the problem of propeller-driven trackbound vehicles for several years.

The reason he publicly advocated his ideas at that particular time was that he believed that such emergency vehicles would help to return German soldiers home after the Armistice had been signed. Theoretically, the months just following a revolution may be the proper psychological time for advocating new ideas in other fields, too. In reality, nothing happens as a rule, if only because of the lack of means.

At any event, the Germans finally got their soldiers home without taking advantage of Dr. Steinitz's suggestion.

BUT the proper sub-section in the Office of the Federal Railroads of the Ministry of Transportation was interested and a single car was built. It wasn't built quite the way Dr. Steinitz wanted it. The chief engineer of this particular railroad shop considered it a rather extreme case of lunacy that Dr. Steinitz wanted ball bearings; who had ever heard of a railroad car running on ball bearings? Dr. Steinitz lost this particular battle. The same man also could not see why the front end of the car should not be square.

Dr. Steinitz had stated that he wanted the front end of the car to look "somewhat like the stem of a ship." The man in charge of the actual building decided that one did not build pointed railroad cars; it just wasn't done. After much complaining, a kind of compromise was reached.

It was not very good, but the completed vehicle did work. It passed a test run with flying colors in May, 1919. It made a run with the railroad committee of the National Assembly on board. It pulled a trailer; by chance, only the heaviest type of freight car happened to be available to serve as a trailer on that day. But the propeller car pulled it just the same.

Then, after a number of noncommittal statements had been issued, it ran for a year around freight yards in Berlin, doing odd jobs of moving freight over short distances, even though Dr. Steinitz had stated over and over again that the propeller drive for trackbound vehicles would work most efficiently for long runs at rather high speeds and that the

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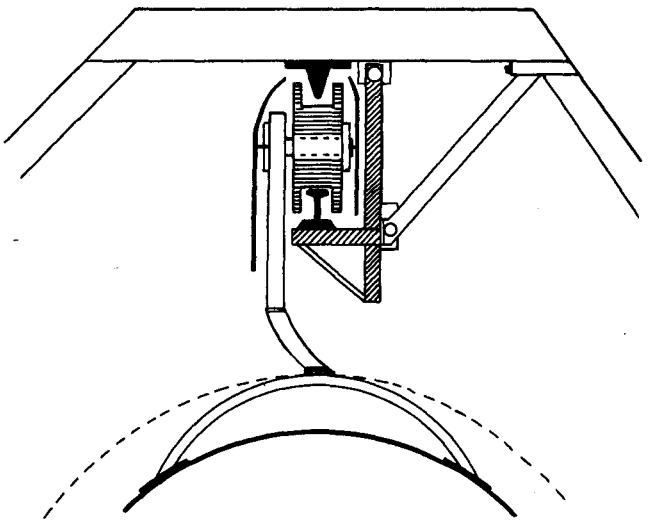

Principle of bogie-wheel suspension for a propeller-driven monorail. The broken line marks the path of the propeller blade tips

propeller drive was not good for stop-and-go driving.

The German railroads had to replace most of their rolling stock, which had been worn out in four years of war with continuous duty and little maintenance. But they built conventional equipment. No lightweight rolling stock. And certainly no propeller drive.

More than ten years later, another engineer by the name of Krukenberg succeeded in persuading the railroad office to build him a streamlined (and lightweight) test car with a pusher propeller. It made several runs between Berlin and Hamburg at record speeds and became the favorite subject of newspaper and newsreel photographers.

And then there came an official statement that propeller-driven railroad cars were "not yet practical."

THE next step was taken by the Scotsman George Bennie in putting together the propeller drive and the monorail.

Many of the objections, some silly, some justified, that had been brought forth against propeller drive for surface vehicles became automatically invalid when applied to overhead monorails. And the propeller drive, on

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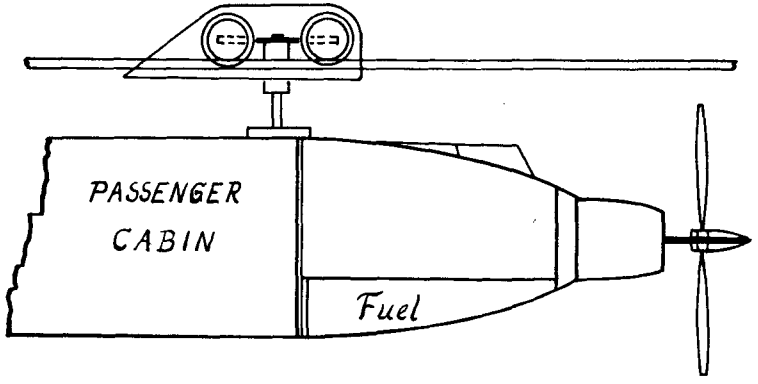
the other hand, greatly simplified the construction of the monorail car. The wheels in the bogies no longer had to be powered and the problem of current supply and current pickup along the line could be eliminated by having the propeller driven by an airplane type engine running on aviation gasoline.

George Bennie was in the fortunate position of being able to do more than write articles about his project and publish detailed drawings. In 1929, he built a 750-foot test section of monorail track, complete with a station and a propeller-driven car. And he predicted as a result of both calculations and tests that a propeller-driven monorail ought to be able to reach speeds of 200 m.p.h. This sounded pretty far-fetched at the time, but he may very well have been conservative in his prediction.

Of course the propeller-driven monorail is something entirely different from the bogie-wheel-driven type in action over the Wupper River and under study for the San Fernando Valley. There the goal is reasonably fast transit for many passengers between closely spaced stations.

The propeller-driven monorail is a means of really rapid transit for large passenger loads in any kind of weather over fairly long distances, with stations spaced widely apart. Just what the spacing of the stations will be and to what overall range monorail systems might be expanded will depend entirely on local conditions, on actual transportations needs.



Front end of a propeller-driven monorail train

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Ideally, for high speeds and efficient operation, the stops should be at least 15 miles apart, while the total length of a run may be 200 miles. Above distances of 200 miles, especially if they are to be traveled non-stop, the airplane begins to assert its superiority.

But within the 200-mile range in congested areas, the only possible competitor in terms of speed would be the large helicopter—the bus-type helicopter. Not being trackbound, it is more flexible than a monorail, but it is not as independent of local weather conditions. And its fuel consumption per ton/mile of payload flown is much higher, of course, probably about ten times as high because airborne equipment has to lift the physical payload in addition to moving it.

Strange as it may seem at first glance, the traffic density on a rigidly proscribed track can compete with that in the apparently boundless atmosphere. The helicopters could fly at many different levels, but at some time they have to land in a specific place, which is the place where a congestion might occur.

AS LONG as a discussion like this one deals with technological problems like speed versus fuel consumption, passenger-carrying capacity over a given route for a specific time interval, and safety of operations in various kinds of assumed weather, you are on reasonably firm ground. But when it comes to financial aspects, such firm foundation for thinking seems to vanish more often than not. I don't know the reasons; I just remember examples from the past.

At one time, a railroad had to go around mountains. It had to do that—or so it was stated—because drilling a tunnel through a mountain would cost far too much, provided it was possible at all.

At some other time, somebody showed why the automobile would always remain a city vehicle. The reason was so simple that a child could understand it. To travel in an automobile from one city to another would require a road of exceptional quality, a quality comparable to a city street. Naturally such roads could be built, but hundreds of miles of such roads would cost so much that the public simply could not afford them.

To discuss the probable cost of a monorail system is, therefore, a very difficult undertaking and a general comparison of costs between monorail, railroad, superhighway and helibus line would quickly turn into science fiction. A real answer can be given only after a specialized and

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thorough study of one particular route, as was made in the case of the San Fernando Valley project. There the financial superiority of the monorail was extreme, to put it mildly, because of the rights of way that had to be bought in an area where they are expensive.

DISTANCE alone is certainly no guide: Chicago to Peoria, Illinois; San Antonio to Corpus Christi, Texas; Atlanta, Georgia, to Birmingham, Alabama; Tacoma, Washington, to Portland, Oregon; Burbank, California, to San Diego; and Providence, Rhode Island, to Newark, New Jersey, are all about the same milage as the Piper Cub flies. But even assuming equal transportation demands—which is certainly wrong—the cost of construction of any connecting trackage would vary enormously from place to place, *without* counting the cost of right of way.

Among the places just quoted, the Chicago to Peoria line probably has the flattest country. There a double-track monorail structure might cost more than a double-track railroad. But once you deal with country that is not flat, the surface rail line encounters expensive items such as grading, cutting through hills, crossing rivers and creeks and similar vagaries of nature.

The monorail encounters the same natural features, but in the vast majority of cases, the structure can neutralize them by the simple expedient of lengthening or shortening the supports. It is just the type of structure that can cope with difficult territory.

Moreover, it is just the type of vehicle that would be useful for serving an airport which is a score of miles from the city to which it belongs.

In short, it is the means for really fast ground transportation and it accomplishes this feat by raising the vehicles a little off the ground—truly a mutant of the iron horse.

—WILLY LEY

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THE SCAPEGOAT

By RICHARD MAPLES

Who would not have pity for a poor, helpless victim? Nobody — except another poor victim!

Illustrated by WEISS

THE OLD GUY didn't have a chance. All he could do was shield his head with limp arms and moan, while this other fellow — a young, husky six-footer — gave him a vicious, cold-blooded beating.

"Hey, there!" I yelled indignantly. "Cut it out!"

But the kid kept belting away, as if he were methodically working out on a fifty-pound training bag. Finally, the old man sagged to the pavement. Then this hoodlum began to kick him.

I'm not a hero. I'm a newspaper man whose job it is to look at things objectively. But I know right from wrong.

My one punch caught the young bruiser back of the ear and spilled him on the ground. He lay there for a moment, then rolled over. Even by the street light, it was easy to see his eyes were glassy.

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It gave me lots of satisfaction. I'm not a big man — just compact — but I take care of myself. I don't drink or smoke and I exercise regularly. The result is I can handle myself in the clinches.

The kid sat up and pushed himself unsteadily to his feet. I could see now that he was a college boy. The red sweater with the terrycloth border and the white pants with a shortened left leg were a dead giveaway.

"Listen here," I said roughly, "you nuts? Beating up an old man!"

He appeared to be desperately searching for an explanation — something to say. Then, abruptly, without having uttered a sound, he reeled away and shambled hurriedly down the street.

My first inclination was to give chase. But the old man groaned and I turned to help him. That was when I had it — a virtual brain storm.

This whole episode, I could see, was a perfect answer to the damnable criticisms leveled at my series on juvenile delinquency. More than that, it was an absolute vindication!

BARELY AN hour ago, I'd had to sit at a meeting and take it on the chin from twenty of the town's leading lights who designated themselves The Committee for the Protection of Youth. The outfit was, of course, politically inspired. It had obviously been started by the Mayor and his gang as a means of torpedoing Jones, the publisher of my paper. Jones, you see, had become politically ambitious himself.

Since I was the star on Jones' team, they piled on me. Some of the nicer things said about my articles were that they constituted filthy muckraking, were a pattern of irresponsible lies, and were designed principally to smear the incumbent politicos. The children of the town, they cried, were being sacrificed to ruthless ambition.

It wouldn't have been so bad if Jones had stuck by me. But he cut and ran. Discretion, he had whispered to me from behind a pudgy hand, was the better part of valor. Then he told them he would discontinue the articles.

Now I had first-hand proof of a particularly brutal bit of delinquency. A cruel assault on a poor, helpless old man! Furthermore, I was the hero of the incident!

Bending down to see how seriously the old man had been hurt, I asked, "What happened, Pop? Was he trying to rob you or something?" He didn't answer.

I looked around for help, but the street was deserted. The best thing, I decided, was to take him

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home. There Nan, my wife, could patch him up while I found out what had happened. I bent down again and pulled him to his feet. He staggered. I put one steadying hand on his shoulder and gripped his wrist with the other. My spine went cold.

It was his flesh. Not so much that it felt like rubber — but the chill. Here we were in the middle of a heat wave, the thermometer nudging ninety, and the old guy's wrist is like an icicle!

For a second, it threw me. Then I thought of shock. That might explain it. And Nan, having been a nurse, would be the one to know.

I started the old man walking. "See if you can make it to my house," I urged. "It's just around the corner."

Nan switched on the porch light when she heard us on the steps. Opening the door, she drew back with a little shriek. The old man was pretty gruesome-looking at that. But it wasn't just his blood-covered face and matted white beard.

There was something spiderish about him. He was angular, and dark, and skeletal. His eyes, deep-set and brooding, seemed to crouch under his shaggy, jutting brows.

"Take it easy, honey," I said. "The old guy just needs some patching up."

SHE RECOVERED quickly and helped him into the house. After we'd eased him into the easy chair by the fireplace in the living room, she turned to me, worried. "Were you in an accident?"

I gave her the story and she looked at me sharply, but didn't speak. She went into the bedroom and came back with blankets and medicine bottles. Tucking the blankets around the old man's legs, she said, "But I don't understand why you were walking. You went to the meeting in Jones' car. Why didn't he bring you back?"

I didn't answer. The old man had closed his eyes and his breathing was becoming very shallow. "Look at him," I said. "Is he all right?"

"He's sleeping. Why don't you answer my question?"

"Jones didn't bring me home because I had words with him and walked away in a huff."

"Over the meeting?"

"Partly." I explained about the meeting and how Jones had backtracked when the going got rough. "After all, it was his idea to build circulation with sensational articles and to use them to attack the present administration. But when there's a showdown, he acts like a scared rabbit. And that's what I told him."

"I'm glad," Nan said, her face

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brightening. "What did he say to that?"

"He gave me a lot of bull about it being a mistake to pick on people's children and how we should stick to old standbys like red-light districts and dope trafficking."

Nan slapped the iodine on the table. "Some nerve! What did you tell him?"

"I told him he was jerking the rug from under me and that I'd be damned if I'd write a bunch of warmed-over tripe. Then I walked away."

"You finally quit!"

Until then, I don't think I'd ever realized just how much Nan hated my work. Of course, off and on, we'd really had some knock-down drag-outs, but I'd never considered them serious. Oh, we often talked about my going into teaching physical ed. It had been my intention ever since college. Some day I'd actually do it.

I shook my head. "No, honey, I didn't quit."

"But you're going to?"

I shrugged in a gesture of helplessness. "How can I? An unprovoked attack against a poor old man is dynamite. It puts me in the driver's seat. I can write an article that will make every mealy-mouthed hypocrite who spoke against me tonight eat his words."

THE FIRE in her eyes died. "It's always something," she said wearily. "Year after year, you've come up with one reason or another to stay in the rotten business. And what does it amount to? Mud-slinging! I'm beginning to think you like it!"

She'd never come out so bluntly and, deep down, I felt my resentment pressing like the sharp edge of a coiled spring. Originally, getting into the newspaper game had been a sort of fluke. Majoring in physical ed at college, I often covered the various sports events for the campus paper. One day, a big-time scandal broke, involving gamblers and one of the teams, and I found myself in a perfect spot to do an exclusive for a city paper. My stuff was run verbatim under a by-line and afterward picked up by the wire services.

Later, with a trick knee keeping me out of the war, I managed to talk myself into a job with the newspaper that had run my expose. I was goaded by a feeling that I ought to be doing something bigger than teaching children how to play games.

From the very start, I discovered I had a peculiar talent. If I found myself anywhere near a skeleton in a closet, I could plainly hear its rattle. Before long, my reputation was firmly established.

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Nan, whom I'd met at college, knew of my ambition to teach and began planning toward that end as soon as we married. She started what she called a quitting fund. This was to stake a move to a small town where her uncle was principal of the high school. He was supposed to help me get a foothold in the new career.

But then Tommy was born and there were bills to pay. After that there were other reasons, like car payments. By the end of the war, the teaching plans were no longer discussed, and Nan and I had drawn so far apart that even the bickering between us had ceased.

Finally, when Tommy was about ten, she suddenly let me have it.

It seems the kid was running around with a tough crowd. She wanted to get him away from the city. He needed the fresh air and the decent, normal home-life of a small town, she said. And she meant every word of it.

Luckily, Jones had come along right about then and offered me a job on his newspaper, back in the old home town. He had an idea he could drive the opposition paper out of business by featuring yellow journalism at the local level. That's where I came in. With my ability to make the news bleed, he figured he could cinch it. For that reason, he was willing to double my present salary. So I accepted.

Nan, of course, was furious, even though I pointed out the extra dough meant we could start planning again. She didn't calm down until I promised to quit the job after six months.

YES, IT WAS always something. She was right enough about that. But she had no right to make such an issue of things. I started to tell her that, then stopped. Maybe she was picking a quarrel to make me forget about the old man and the story. I threw a fast block into my resentment.

"Honey," I said, "don't be unreasonable. Remember this job with Jones was supposed to get Tommy away from the city, and the extra dough was all part of that big plan for the teaching business."

"What plan?" she flared. "There never was a plan except to pamper your vanity! Big-shot Potter, the whiz-bang newspaperman! That's all you've ever been interested in!"

I had to take a deep breath to keep from yelling back at her. "You're not being very fair about this. I did it all with you and Tommy in mind."

Her voice lowered. "Is that so? Well, how about the promise to quit in six months? We've saved the money. What marvelous

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thing do you have in mind for me and Tommy now?"

That *hurt*. As a matter of fact, I'd been quite enjoying the stint with Jones. My series on juvenile delinquency had just about doubled circulation and that gave me a deep sense of accomplishment. Then, too, writing the stuff against the Mayor and the rest of the town's big-wigs — in keeping with Jones' political ambitions — nurtured a feeling of power that was very satisfying.

Frankly, the meeting earlier that evening had set me down harder than I cared to admit. Now, with every chance for a comeback, Nan wanted me to pass!

"Listen," I snarled, "so it's hot. So don't take it out on me!"

Her fists bunched and the color drained from her face. Knowing the signs, I could tell this was going to be a lulu.

But the door flew open and Tommy came clomping through the hallway and into the front room. He's a big kid for his age, mentally and physically. He spotted the old man right away.

"Gollee!" he breathed excitedly. "Who's the creep?"

"Never mind," Nan said, quickly recovering her composure. "He's had an accident. Just get some money from your father and go to the drugstore for more bandages. I'll need them."

I gave him a buck and he ran out the kitchen way, slamming the back door so hard, the whole house shook.

The old man's eyes flickered open. He looked at me first, then at Nan. "Well," he said in a peculiar muffled tone that suggested he was speaking through an obstruction like a fencing mask, "isn't this cozy!"

I immediately threw a lot of questions at him. His name, he said, was Ashe — just plain Ashe. He couldn't remember any other name. He couldn't remember why he'd been beaten up, nor what had led up to it. He was very confused. He thought maybe it would all come back to him later. However, he did remember my rescuing him and he appreciated that very much. Hearing him say so gave me a nice, tingling glow. I invited him to stay for dinner and he accepted.

NAN objected. "There's only salad," she wailed. "It was too hot to cook."

"Salad's fine," I told her.

"Oh, Ted, please!"

"Listen here," I said coldly, "I've invited Ashe to stay and he's accepted. Why all the fuss?"

She gave me a hurt look, turned, flounced into the kitchen. I started to follow, thinking I'd made a mistake in being so brusque. Then I thought, the heck

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with it. Let her take it any way she wanted.

Sweat was plastering my shirt and pants to me like a skindiver's outfit. I needed a shower. I told Ashe to rest easy and went into the bathroom.

When I came out, Tommy had returned. He and the old man were busily gabbing. Nan, standing by the kitchen door, frantically signaled me to join her. In the kitchen, she backed me against the sink. "Get him out of here!"

"Why?" I asked, startled.

"There's something wrong with him."

"Wrong?"

"He gives me the willies."

"It's just the heat," I scoffed.

"If you must know, he — he leered at me! While you were in the shower. It was awful!"

"Nan, do you think that kind of yarn is going to stop me from writing about what happened tonight? It won't. And you can make up your mind I'm keeping the job. When I get through with the people in this town, they'll know they've been dealing with Edward Potter!"

Tight-lipped, she went to the refrigerator for the supper.

As soon as we'd sat down, Ashe began to talk. He kept it up through the entire meal. He'd been everywhere and done everything, to hear him tell it. Tommy, listening bug-eyed, kept asking questions. It sort of got me. The hero of the affair, to my own son, was Ashe!

It was Nan who finally blew the whistle.

"Mr. Ashe," she said, her voice honed to a razor-edge, "I'm sure Ted would be much more interested in knowing what led up to the fight tonight — or are you still confused?"

There was a beat of three while he studied Nan carefully. Then he said, "It's quite apparent, Mrs. Potter, that you've absolutely no use for me. This shows discernment. Most likely, with a woman's instinct, you've hit upon at least part of the truth. Because of that, it might be wise to lay all my cards on the table. But I warn you, it will be hard to believe."

"That," said Nan, leaning back with a gleam of triumph in her eyes, "I'll bet on!"

IT WAS hard to believe, all right. So hard, in fact, that I thought he was just pulling Nan's leg.

He said he'd come from another world, outside our solar system, where people existed in a kind of liquid state, bouncing about, for the most part, like large water-filled bladders. They were, however, capable of taking almost any shape their superior

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minds willed. They could flatter and drift about in the water, or they could inflate and rise in the air. They could even become facsimiles of other living things, taking on the shape, texture and coloration, a capability which aided greatly in their main function of traveling as missionaries of goodness amongst the peoples of the Galaxy. For they were perfect — as perfect as angels.

As he talked, Nan's face got redder and redder. Finally, when I couldn't keep from snickering, she jumped up, grabbed her empty plate and headed for the kitchen.

"Don't rush off, honey," I said innocently.

She stopped at the kitchen door and glared at me. "I guess I know when I'm being kidded!"

"But," said Ashe in his cold, dry purr, "I'm not kidding."

It seemed to me the joke had gone far enough. "Don't tell me," I said sarcastically, "that you're a missionary to Earth!"

"No," he admitted. "I'm here because I was banished."

"Oh. A sort of fallen angel!"

"Exactly."

Another chill scurried along my spine. It was his tone of voice more than anything. But then, too, his eyes had a dull, black humorlessness about them.

Nan returned to the table and sat down. I noticed a band of perspiration mustaching her upper lip. Indeed, I seemed to have grown much hotter myself.

Irritably, I said, "Ashe, it's too damn warm for games. If you don't want to explain what happened this evening, that's your privilege. But, as you know, the story means a lot to me. And I did stick my neck out for you!"

He held up a gnarled hand. "One moment, my boy. Let me finish."

So he finished. And the rest of the story was even nuttier.

He was a throwback, he said with quiet pride. The perfection which had taken his people countless years to attain was wiped out the moment he came into being. They'd tried to reform him, but there was something fundamental about his evil — as if it were an essence.

As a last resort, they'd put him into one of their wonderful machines and thrown the switch. At that agonizing instant, he'd imagined himself to be water scraping over the edge of a sharp rock. Then he'd come to, drifting through space. And, much later, he'd touched Earth. Once landed, he'd taken on many shapes, through the years — mainly, however, of people who'd died.

EVEN AS HE talked, I was carefully sliding my chair back. If I could reach the phone

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in the hallway without being noticed, it would be fairly simple to get help. But he saw what I was doing and laughed.

"Edward," he said, "I know you don't believe me, but stick around until I prove it."

What happened next almost made me sick to my stomach. His face, which had been as wrinkled as a fielder's mitt, all of a sudden took on the appearance of a disturbed reflection in a pool of water. His flesh began to writhe like a tangled mass of earthworms. Thirty seconds after it began, he'd sloughed off thirty years. Even his beard, which had been as white as shower-room tiling, became a fierce, dead black.

I heard Tommy pipe, "Gol*lee!*" and Nan sigh — only it sounded more like a groan. I shook away the dazed feeling and it was immediately replaced by a great excitement.

"Listen here," I said hoarsely, "this story will set the whole country on its ear. With my by-line on it!"

"Oh, Ted," Nan cried, "don't let him take you in! It's a trick. It's — it's mass hypnotism or something."

"The trouble with you," I said, "is you don't believe even what you see with your own eyes!"

The next day, I went to see Jones. We'd decided — Ashe and I — upon a course of action. The existence of Ashe was to remain a secret, but I was to keep my job with the paper at all costs. Then we could sit back and wait for the opportune moment to spill it, a time when we had the best angle and were positive Ashe wouldn't be labeled a hoax.

Driving to the plant, I was tense enough to snap. It was not entirely from the unabated heat, either. I didn't like the way Ashe had acted during the latter part of the evening.

Naturally I had felt disappointment at not being able to reveal his presence. But what rankled most was the guy's colossal gall. Okay, so I'm childish, only I just don't like to have someone gobble up my share of the dessert.

He'd also borrowed all the cash in the house and then demanded I draw on my bank account. I quickly discouraged that. But the topper was his forcing Nan and me to sleep on the couch while he used the bed. He said his bruises still hurt, even though they weren't visible.

MY MOOD didn't improve when Jones kept me waiting for over an hour. Surprisingly enough, he was in good spirits. As I entered the office, he indicated one of the leather chairs and said with a laugh, "Sit down, Ted. I've got some good news."

My opinion of him the previ-

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ous evening obviously hadn't been taken very much to heart. Sourly, I told him, "As a publisher, you should know that good news is no news."

The smile left his face. Then, with a visible effort, he forced it back. "You have something there, Ted. You certainly have. But point of view is important, also. You see, they've arrested a gang of kids for shoplifting. One of them is Tommy, your son."

I jumped up. "Arrested Tommy!"

"Now wait, Ted. Don't go off half-cocked. It's a break. Don't you see? You can cover delinquency with the lid off now. You'll be writing as a parent in the same boat with other parents. . ."

I could still hear his frantic noises after I'd slammed the door behind me and run the length of the corridor.

At the police station, I had the distinct feeling they'd been waiting for me. I knew most of them, especially the big red-headed guy who beckoned me into a rear office. His name was Thompson — Detective Emanuel Thompson. He always looked as if he wore a football uniform under his dark blue suit. My articles had roasted him plenty. He handled juvenile delinquency cases.

"Well, Mr. Potter," he greeted me, smiling tightly, "we meet under unfortunate circumstances."

"Can the phony sympathy," I said. "You're not the type. Just let me see my boy."

He used a red-and-blue handkerchief to wipe the dampness from his beefy neck. "I think we'd better have a little talk first."

"I got no talking to do. This is a lousy frame-up against me and the paper. Get my son out here and do it fast!"

HE put the handkerchief away, sighed and reached for the phone.

It really got me when Tommy came into the room. He'd been crying; his face was streaked, and he looked scared and forlorn.

"Son," I said, finding it difficult to keep the rasp out of my voice, "if you've got a hat, put it on and let's go."

Thompson pulled out his handkerchief again and carefully lowered himself into the chair behind the desk. "You don't seem to understand, Mr. Potter. Your boy is in trouble. He's been identified as leading a gang of kids who spent most of the morning shoplifting in stores all over town."

"That's bull," I said. "How could my boy do a thing like that? He's only twelve. Who identified him, anyway?"

"The shopkeepers and the other members of the gang."

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FOR ONE awful moment, I felt a great cavity of doubt. "Son," I asked, "what's this all about?"

Tommy's face creased with fear and tears brimmed his eyes. "It was Ashe," he quavered.

"Ashe?"

"Yes. I told him about the gang."

"Gang?"

"The Red Skulls."

"What the heck are you talking about?"

"Some of the fellows got together and built a hut for a clubhouse over on the garbage dump. We call ourselves the Red Skulls. I was made leader. I'm called the Skull Cap."

"Why haven't I heard about this?"

"You never asked, Dad. I tried to tell you one night, but you were hurrying to get to that roadhouse on the turnpike. You said you had a big lead on juvenile delinquency."

"Well, you certainly didn't try very hard," I said angrily. "What was this gang's purpose?"

"Oh, different things. One of the fellows has a .22 and we hunt rats. Then —"

"Go on."

"That's all."

"You started to say something else."

He kicked at the floor. "Aw, gee!"

"Let's have it!"

"We smoked."

"Smoked!"

He nodded.

"And what else?"

"That's all. Honest!"

Thompson said, "What about shoplifting?"

"No," sniveled Tommy. "That was Ashe. He wanted me to talk the gang into shoplifting, but I wouldn't. Then he changed himself to look like me and talked the fellows into it when I wasn't around. I only know about it because I ran into them after they'd been in a store . . ."

Thompson gave me a funny look. "Who's this Ashe he keeps talking about?"

I started to tell him. Then I got a sudden mental flash of how idiotic it would all sound. "The boy," I said evenly, "is beside himself because of all he's been through. It's time to call a halt to this farce. I'm going to hire myself some legal talent."

He shrugged. "Suit yourself."

Tommy grabbed my arm and cried, "Please don't leave me, Dad!"

I pulled away from him, feeling as if I'd dropped him off a cliff.

Right outside the station, I met Nan. She was pale and breathless. Jones had phoned the news. She wanted to go to Tommy immediately.

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I guided her to the car and pushed her inside. "Listen here," I said tensely, "for once, don't make a fuss. Just help me find Ashe. He's the one who can free Tommy."

SHE BEGAN to laugh. "That's a hot one!" she gasped. "That's *really* a hot one!"

I shook her, thinking she was hysterical.

She stopped laughing and swallowed hard. "Ashe is home."

"Home?"

"Blind drunk, with a blonde on his knee."

I tramped so hard on the accelerator that it must have scraped the ground all the way home. Ashe didn't hear me pull up to the house because the radio was going full blast. I hit the light switch in the hallway and the brightness flared against the lengthening afternoon shadows, spotting him and the blonde on the living room couch.

The blonde looked as if she'd come from a burlesque runway. Ashe dumped her on the floor and staggered to his feet. He'd changed his appearance again. Now he looked a strikingly handsome twenty-five. He came forward to throw a heavy arm around my shoulder.

"Glad to see you, Ted," he mouthed. "Ran out of money. Must have more. Small loan . . ."

I put both hands on his chest and pushed. He stumbled back and thudded against the wall. "The police have picked up Tommy," I said flatly. "He's been charged with the shoplifting you did today."

He sobered instantly. He jerked the blonde to her feet, booted her out, slammed the door and came back to me. "Ted, I'm shocked to hear this. Tell me about it quickly. We must do something right away."

The blonde had begun to howl and scream curses. I could hear doors and windows opening all the way down the street. "You monster!" Nan spat, and hurried outside. Presently the girl quieted down.

"Ted," Ashe whispered, "I'm ashamed of myself. Here you befriended me and all I've done is get you and your family in trouble." He held a cupped hand over his eyes as if he were shading tears. "Can you possibly find it in your heart to forgive me?"

I was moved. After all, a poor, homeless alien being couldn't very well be expected to understand our manners and feelings. Yet this one did. All because he'd been touched by my friendship.

"Ashe," I said, feeling the the warmth of good will, "I'm happy to hear you say that. Bygones are bygones. The important thing is springing Tommy."

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"Exactly," he said. "We'll go and explain everything to the police. But we'll do it in grand style. This is your big show. We must have Jones and the Mayor. We must have photographers, reporters, television, radio — everything!"

NAN RETURNED. "The girl will be all right. She was just upset."

"Honey," I told her excitedly, "we're about to stand the whole country on its collective ear. Ashe is going to reveal his identity!"

Nan's face pinched into a look of disgust. "You mean you're trusting this — this creature again?"

"Sure, honey. Anyone can make a mistake."

"That's right!" she exploded. "You're making one now! Oh, Ted, stop being such a fool!"

"Listen here," I said, "this is the last two minutes of the game. We're trying to score before the gun — and you start an argument!"

She began to blubber.

Why must she always be so unreasonable? Why the constant bickering and tension and unhappiness? I was sick to death of it. I grabbed Ashe's arm. "Come on," I said, "let's go."

Even outdoors, the air felt hot and clammy. I headed the car for the plant, figuring I could do my phoning from there as well as pick a crew. But on Main Street, Ashe spotted a cab and made me stop.

He said he'd better go on ahead. He thought things would work smoother that way. He could start the ball rolling on the release of Tommy, and I wouldn't be held up by having to tell people who he was.

I drove on alone. But it was a mistake. People simply didn't believe my story about an alien being. In various ways and tones of voice, they all suggested I go home and sleep it off. In desperation, I went up to Jones' house, even though he'd already told me on the phone that he was in the middle of a dinner party.

He came up close to me and sniffed my breath.

"Don't worry," I told him. "I never touch it. But maybe I should smell yours. Anyone who turns his back on the biggest story of all time must be drunk!"

He jerked the cigar from his mouth and gave me a narrow-eyed, searching look. "Ted, I just hope for your sake this isn't some kind of a joke."

FIFTEEN minutes later, we pulled up to the police station in a three car convoy, with a big crew from the paper. I led the group inside, feeling the ex-

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citement grow in me. I marched up to the desk sergeant. "Where is he?"

The desk sergeant looked startled. "Who?"

Well, he wasn't there. He just wasn't there! It was like getting tackled two yards from a touchdown by a tackler you hadn't realized was anywhere near!

Jones pushed forward, chewing agitatedly on his cigar. "Edward, you've got some nerve, pulling a stunt like this! It's an outrage!"

"Take it easy," I said weakly. "Something's gone wrong."

"It certainly has. You must have gone insane!"

"Listen here! If you don't stick with me on this, I'm all through with the paper!"

"That suits me fine!"

I watched him leave, trailing cigar smoke. The others followed. My face burned and sweat trickled down my back and along my sides. I wanted to hit out at something . . .

A hand gripped my elbow. It was Sergeant Thompson. "Mr. Potter, you shouldn't let this get you down. People's kids get in scrapes all the time. Tomorrow you'll have a talk with the judge and everything will turn out okay."

I jerked my elbow away. "In other words, you think I'm batty, too!"

"No," he said, gripping my elbow again and starting me toward the door. "It's been hot and you just need some rest."

"Thompson," I said, dragging myself to a halt, "I know it sounds nuts, but this Ashe character really exists. Help me find him and you can cut yourself a slice. It'll be big time!"

The grip on my elbow increased. "Go home, Mr. Potter, and get a good night's sleep."

"But it's on the level, Thompson. Jones and I busted up. I'm playing on your team now!"

His face got all flushed. "My job isn't a game and I don't belong to any team. Get wise, will you? Stay in your own back yard for once. It could stand a lot of weeding!" He pushed me out the door then — so hard, I almost fell.

STANDING there, feeling the heat press in on me, I tried to dope out the next move. My car was still at Jones' place, so I'd need a cab. I turned toward the drugstore at the end of the block where I could phone. Walking along, I recalled Ashe had taken a cab earlier in the evening. If I could talk to the driver, I might get a lead on his whereabouts. I walked faster.

I thought of Thompson and his remark about the back yard . . . and the weeds. Again, for the

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third time, a chill traveled the length of my spine. I began to run. I ran past the drugstore and all the way home.

They were both in the bedroom. Nan stood in the far corner with her back against the wall. Her shoulders were scratched and her lip cut. She held a heavy bookend poised to strike at Ashe, who was in front of her, moving stealthily forward.

The moment I spun him around, I froze in amazement. I couldn't recognize him. Then, all at once, I realized I was looking at the spitting image of myself.

He broke from my grasp and darted to the window. Before I could follow, Nan had dropped the bookend and flung herself into my arms. "Oh, Ted," she sobbed, "I *knew* it wasn't you!"

I kissed her and gently disengaged her arms. "I've got to get Ashe," I said.

When I vaulted through the window and circled the house, I spotted him rushing down the street. I caught him around the corner at the same spot where I'd first seen him.

I slugged him. Yet I knew it was useless the instant the blow landed. He felt just like sponge rubber. But I kept hitting him. I didn't bother listening to his cries and I didn't give a damn that he'd changed himself back to an old man.

The blow on the back of my neck was so sudden, I didn't feel it. The only sensation was unbalance, as if I were walking uphill. Then I was slapped with the sidewalk.

Looking up, I could see he was young, clean-cut and well built. His long, horsy face was furious. "You crazy?" he yelled. "Beating up an old man!"

I searched desperately for an explanation — something to say. Then, abruptly, without having uttered a sound, I reeled away and shambled hurriedly down the street . . . home, to Nan.

— RICHARD MAPLES

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The Venus Trap

By EVELYN E. SMITH

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

One thing Man never counted on to take along into space with him was the Eternal Triangle — especially a true-blue triangle like this!

"WHAT'S the matter, darling?" James asked anxiously. "Don't you like the planet?"

"Oh, I love the planet," Phyllis said. "It's beautiful."

It was. The blue—really blue—grass, blue-violet shrubbery and, loveliest of all, the great golden tree with sapphire leaves and pale pink blossoms, instead of looking alien, resembled nothing so much as a fairy-tale version of Earth.

Even the fragrance that filled the atmosphere was completely delightful to Terrestrial nostrils—which was unusual, for most other planets, no matter how well adapted for colonization otherwise, tended, from the human viewpoint, anyway, to stink. Not that they were not colonized nevertheless, for the population of Earth was expanding at too great a rate to permit merely olfactory considerations to rule out an otherwise suitable planet. This particular group of settlers had been lucky, indeed, to have drawn a planet as pleasing to the nose as to the eye—and, moreover, free from hostile aborigines.

As a matter of fact, the only apparent evidence of animate life were the small, bright-hued crea-

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tures winging back and forth through the clear air, and which resembled Terrestrial birds so closely that there had seemed no point to giving them any other name. There were insects, too, although not immediately perceptible—but the ones like bees were devoid of stings and the butterflies never had to pass through the grub stage but were born in the fullness of their beauty.

However, fairest of all the creatures on the planet to James Haut—just then, anyhow—was his wife, and the expression on her face was not a lovely one.

"You do feel all right, don't you?" he asked. "The light gravity gets some people at first."

"Yes, I guess I'm all right. I'm still a little shaken, though, and you know it's not the gravity."

HE WOULD have liked to take her in his arms and say something comforting, reassuring, but the constraint between them had not yet been worn off. Although he had sent her an ethergram nearly every day of the voyage, the necessarily public nature of the messages had kept them from achieving communication in the deeper sense of the word.

"Well, I suppose you did have a bit of a shock," he said lamely. "Somehow, I thought I had told you in my 'grams."

"You told me plenty in the 'grams, but not quite enough, it seems."

Her words didn't seem to make sense; the strain had evidently been a little too much. "Maybe you ought to go inside and lie down for a while."

"I will, just as soon as I feel less wobbly." She brushed back the long, light brown hair which had got tumbled when she fainted. He remembered a golden rather than a reddish tinge in it, but that had been under the yellow sun of Earth; under the scarlet sun of this planet, it took on a different beauty.

"How come the preliminary team didn't include — *it* in their report?" she asked, avoiding his appreciative eye.

"They didn't know. We didn't find out ourselves until we'd sent that first message to Earth. I suppose by the time we did relay the news, you were on your way."

"Yes, that must have been it."

The preliminary exploration team had established the fact that the planet was more or less Earth-type, that its air was breathable, its temperature agreeably springlike, its mineral composition very similar to Earth's, with only slight traces of unknown elements, that there was plenty of drinkable water and no threatening life-forms. Human beings could, therefore, live on it.

It remained for the scout team

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to determine whether human beings would *want* to live on it — whether, in fact, they themselves would want to, because, if so, they had the option of becoming the first settlers. That was the way the system worked and, in the main, it worked well enough.

After less than two weeks, this scout team had beamed back to Earth the message that the planet was suitable for colonization, so suitable that they would like to give it the name of Elysium, if there was no objection.

There would be none, Earth had replied, so long as the pioneers bore in mind the fact that six other planets had previously been given that name, and a human colony currently existed on only one of those. No need to worry about a conflict of nomenclature, however, because the name of that other planet Elysium had subsequently been changed by unanimous vote of settlers to Hades.

AFTER this somewhat sinister piece of information, Earth had added the more cheerful news that the wives and families of the scouts would soon be on their way, bringing with them the tools and implements necessary to transform the wilderness of the frontier into another Earth. In the meantime, the men were to set up the packaged buildings with which all scout ships were equipped, so that when the women came, homes would be ready for them.

The men set to work and, before the month was out, they discovered that Elysium was neither a wilderness nor a frontier. It was populated by an intelligent race which had developed its culture to the limit of its physical abilities — actually well beyond the limit of what the astounded Terrestrials could have conceived its physical abilities to be — then, owing to unavoidable disaster, had started to die out.

The remaining natives were perspicacious enough to see in the Terrestrials' coming not a threat but a last hope of revivifying their own moribund species. Accordingly, the Earthmen were encouraged to go ahead building on the sites originally selected, the only ban being on the type of construction materials used — and a perfectly reasonable one under the circumstances.

James had built his cottage near the largest, handsomest tree in the area allotted to him; since there were no hostile life-forms, there was no need for a closely knit community. Everyone who had seen it agreed that his house was the most attractive one of all, for, although it was only a standard prefab, he had used taste and ingenuity to make it a

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little different from the other unimaginative homes.

And now Phyllis, for whom he had performed all this labor of love, for whom he had waited five long months — the tedium of which had been broken only by the intellectual pleasure of teaching English to a sympathetic native neighbor — Phyllis seemed unappreciative. She had hardly looked at the inside of the cottage, when he had shown her through, and now was staring at the outside in a blank sort of way.

The indoctrination courses had not, he reflected, reconciled her to the frontiersman's necessarily simple mode of living—which was ironic, considering that one of her original attractions for him had been her apparent suitability for the pioneer life. She was a big girl, radiantly healthy, even though a little green at the moment.

HE JUST managed to keep his voice steady. "You don't like the house — is that it?

"But I *do* like it. Honestly I do." She touched his arm diffidently. "Everything would be perfect if only—"

"If only what? Is it the curtains? I'm sorry if you don't like them. I brought them all the way from Earth in case the planet turned out to be habitable. I thought blue was your favorite color."

"Oh, it is, it is! I'm mad about the curtains."

Perhaps it wasn't the house that disappointed her; perhaps it was he himself who hadn't lived up to dim memory and ardent expectation.

"If you want to know what *is* bothering me—"she glanced up apprehensively, l o w e r i n g her voice as she did—"it's that tree. It's stuck on you; I just know it is."

He laughed. "Now where did you get a preposterous idea like that, Phyl? You've been on the planet exactly twenty-four hours and—"

"—and I have, in my luggage, one hundred and thirty-two ethergrams talking about practically nothing but Magnolia this, Magnolia that. Oh, I had my suspicions even before I landed, James. The only thing I didn't suspect was that she was a *tree*!"

"What are you talking about, honey? Magnolia and I — we're just friends."

"Purely a platonic relationship, I assure you," the tree herself agreed. It would have been silly for her to pretend not to have overheard, since the two were still standing almost directly underneath her. "Purely platonic."

"She's more like a sister to me," James tried to explain.

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PHYLLIS stiffened. "Frankly, if I had imagined I was going to have a tree for a sister-in-law, I would have thought before I married you, James." Bursting into tears, she ran inside the cottage.

"Sorry," he said miserably to Magnolia. "It's a long trip out from Earth and an uncomfortable one. I don't suppose the other women were especially nice to her, either. Faculty wives mostly and you know how they are . . . No, I don't suppose you would. But she shouldn't have acted that way toward you."

"Not your fault," Magnolia told him, sighing with such intensity that he could feel the humidity rise. "I know how you've been looking forward to her arrival. Rather a letdown, isn't it?"

"Oh, I'm sure it'll be all right." He tried to sound confident. "And I know you'll like Phyllis when you get to know her."

"Possibly, but so far I'm afraid I must admit—since there never has been any pretense between us—that she is a bit of a disappointment. I—and my sisters also — had expected your females, when they came, to be as upright and true blue as you. Instead, what are they? Shrubs."

The door to the cottage flew open. "A shrub, am I!" Phyllis brandished an axe which, James winced to recall, was an item of the equipment he had ordered from Earth before the scout team had learned that the trees were intelligent. "I'll shrub you!"

"Phyllis!" He wrested the axe from her grip. "That would be murder!"

"'Woodman,' as the Terrestrial poem goes," the tree remarked, "'spare that tree! Touch not a single bough! In youth it sheltered me and I'll protect it now!'"

Good of her to take the whole thing so calmly—rather, to pretend to take it so calmly, for he knew how sensitive Magnolia really was — but he was afraid this show of moral courage would not diminish Phyllis's dislike for her; those without self-control seldom appreciate those who have it.

"If you'll excuse us," he said, putting his arm around his wife's heaving shoulders, "I'd better see to Phyllis; she's a little upset. Holdover from spacesickness, I expect. Poor girl, she's a long way from home and frightened."

"I understand, Jim," Magnolia told him, "and, remember, whatever happens, you can always count on me."

"I MUST say you're not a very admirable representative of Terrestrial womanhood!" James snapped, as soon as the door had slammed behind him and his wife, leaving them alone together in

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the principal room of the cottage. "Insulting the very first native you meet!"

"I did not either insult her. All I said was, 'What beautiful flowers —do you suppose the fruit is edible?' How was I to know it —*she* could understand? Naturally I wouldn't dream of eating her fruit now. It would probably taste nasty anyway. And how do you think *I* felt when a *tree* answered me back? You don't care that I fainted dead away, and I've never fainted before in my life. All you care about is that old vegetable's feelings! It was bad enough, feeling for five months that someone had come between us, but to find out it wasn't some*one* but some*thing*—!"

"Phyllis," he said coldly, "I'll thank you to keep a civil tongue in your head."

Dropping into the overstuffed chair, his wife dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief. "She wasn't so very polite to me!"

"Look, Phyllis—"he strove to make his voice calm, adult, reasonable—"you happened to have hit on rather a touchy point with her. Those trees are dioecious, you know, like us, and she isn't mated. And, well, she has rather a lot of xylem zones—rings, you know."

"Are you trying to tell me she's old?"

"Well, she's no sapling any more. And, consideration aside, you know it's government's policy for us to establish good relations with any intelligent life-form we have to share a planet with. You weren't in there trying."

Phyllis put away her handkerchief with what he hoped would be a final sniff. "I suppose I shouldn't have acted that way," she conceded.

"Now you're talking like my own dear Phyllis," James said tenderly, though, as a matter of fact, he had a very remote idea of what his own dear Phyllis was like. He had met her only a couple of months before the scout mission was scheduled, and so their courtship had been brief, and the actual weeks of marriage even briefer. He had remembered Phyllis as beautiful—and she was beautiful. He had not, however, remembered her as pig-headed—and pig-headed she was, too.

"How come she hasn't a mate? I didn't think trees were choosy."

HE WOULDN'T take exception to that statement, uncharitable though it was; after all, someone whose only acquaintance with trees had been with the Terrestrial variety would naturally be incapable of appreciating the total tree at its highest development.

"It's a great tragedy," he told her in a hushed tone. "There was

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a blight some years back and most of the male trees died off, except for a few on the other side of the planet—well out of beeshot, even if the females there would let the females here have any pollen, which they absolutely won't."

"I don't blame them," Phyllis said coldly. Of course she would identify at once with the trees whose domestic lives seemed to be threatened.

"It's not that so much. It's that the male trees produce so little pollen."

"This would be a good place for people with hay fever then, wouldn't it?"

"And even when there is fruit, so much of it tends to be parthenocarpous — no seeds." He sighed. "The entire race is dying out."

"How is it you know so much about botany?" she asked suspiciously. "It's not your field."

"I don't know so very much, really," he smiled. "I had to learn a little, if I wanted to work the land, so I borrowed an elementary text from Cutler." Had he been a trifle idealistic in quitting his snug, if uninspiring, job on the faculty to join in this Utopian venture? So many of the other men at the university had enrolled, it had seemed a splendid idea until Phyllis's arrival.

"Daddy never had any trouble working his land and he doesn't know a thing about botany. You've been boning up on it just to please *her*!"

"Phyllis! How can you jump to conclusions without a shred of evidence?" Not that she wouldn't be able to collect such evidence later, because the allegation happened to be correct. *If, instead of coming to Elysium, I had merely gone to China, would she have thought it so odd that I studied Chinese? Then why, where the natives are trees, shouldn't I study botany? The woman is unreasonable.*

"AND will her — people let you farm?"

Now he could show her how cogently and comprehensively he could answer a logical question. "That aspect of the situation will be all right, dear, because only the trees are an intelligent species and, even of them, some aren't so bright. They won't have any more objection to our eating the other fruit and vegetables than we would have to an extraterrestrial's eating our eggs and chickens, for example. We're going to try to introduce some Earth plants here, though, as the higher forms of vegetation are dying out and we're afraid the lower might follow. Pity it's too late for a sound conservation program."

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PHYLLIS said grimly, "She doesn't think it's too late for a sound conservation program. She still has hopes—far-fetched, maybe, and I'm not so sure they are. Mark my words, James, she's got designs on *you*."

"Don't be idiotic," he protested. "That would be—" he attempted to introduce a light note — "it would be miscegenation."

"These foreigners can't be expected to have our standards." And she burst into tears again. "A fine thing to go through that miserable five-month trip only to find out a tree has alienated my husband's affections."

"Oh, come on, Phyl!" He still was trying for a smile. "What would a tree see in me?"

"I'm beginning to wonder what I saw in you. You never loved me; you just wanted a wife to come out and colonize with you and b-b-breed."

What could he say? It was almost true. Phyllis was a beautiful girl and he loved her, but, if he had planned to remain as an instructor with the Romance Languages Department instead of joining the scout mission, he knew he would never have asked her to be his wife . . . for her sake, of course, as well as his own. He should say something to reassure her, but the words wouldn't come.

"I don't like it here," Phyllis sobbed. "I don't like blue leaves. I don't like blue grass. I like them green, the way they're supposed to be. I hate this nasty planet. It's all wrong. I want to go home."

She was very young—less than eight years younger than he, true, but he was mature for his age. They didn't know each other very well. And, finally, there were more men than women on the planet and he had noticed that the bachelors had seemed readily disposed, upon her arrival the day before, to overlook the fact that she had no college degree. So he must be patient with her.

"There's nothing wrong about it, dear. The plants here synthesize cyanophyll instead of chlorophyll; that's why the leaves are blue instead of green. And, of course, there are different mineral constituents of the soil — more aluminum and copper, for instance, than on Earth, and some elements we haven't quite isolated yet. So, you see, they're bound to be a little different from Terrestrial trees."

"A little different I wouldn't mind," she said sulkily, "but they're a lot different without being nearly alien enough."

"Look, Phyllis — *dear* — those trees have been very hospitable, very kind. We owe them a lot. They themselves suggested that we come here and live with them in, so to speak, symbiosis."

"That's a fine idea!"

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HE BEAMED. "I knew you'd understand after I had explained it to you."

"We provide the brains and they provide the furniture."

"Phyllis! What a thing to say!"

"I've heard of man-eating trees before. I suppose there could be man-loving ones, too."

"Phyllis, these trees are as gentle and sweet as—as—" He didn't know how he could explain it to her. No one who had never been friends with a tree could appreciate the true beauty of the xylemic character. "Why, we even offered to go over to the other side of the planet and fetch some pollen for them, but they wouldn't hear of it. Unfortunately, they'd rather die than be mated to anyone they had never met."

"What a perfectly disgusting idea!"

"I don't think so. Trees can be idealistic—"

"You fetching pollen for her, I mean. Naturally she wouldn't want pollen from a tree on the other side of the planet. She wants *you*!"

"Don't be silly. Incompatibility usually exists between the pollen of one species and the stigmata of another. Besides," he added patiently, "I haven't got pollen."

"You'd better not, or it won't be her who'll have the stigmata."

"Phyllis—" he sat down on the arm of her chair and tried to embrace her—"you know that you're the only life-form I love."

"Please, James." She pushed him away. "I guess I love you, too, in spite of everything . . . but I don't want to make a public spectacle of myself."

"What do you mean now?"

"That tree would know everything that goes on. She's telepathic."

"Where did you get a ridiculous idea like that? What kind of rubbish have you been reading?"

"All right, tell me: how else did she learn to speak such good English?"

"It's because she's of a very high order of intelligence. And I suppose—" he laughed modestly — "because I'm such a good teacher."

"I don't care how good a teacher you are—a tree couldn't learn to speak a language so well in five months. She must be telepathic. It's the only explanation."

"GIVE her time," the tree advised later, as James came out on the lawn to talk to his only friend on the planet.

He hadn't seen much of the other scouts since the house-building frenzy had started, and visits among the men had decreased. The base camp, where the bachelors and the older married couples lived, was located a

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good distance away from his land, for he had raised his honeymoon cottage far from the rest; he had wanted to have his Phyllis all to himself. In the idyll he had visualized for the two of them, she would need no company but his. Little had he imagined that, within twenty-four hours of her arrival, he would be looking for company himself.

"I suppose so," he said, kicking at a root. "Oh, I'm sorry, Maggie; I didn't think."

"That's all right," Magnolia said bravely. "It didn't really hurt. That female has got you all upset, you poor boy."

James muttered a feeble defense of his wife.

"Jim, forgive me if I speak frankly," the tree went on in a low rustle, "but do you think she's really worthy of you?"

"Of course she is!"

"Surely on your planet you could have found a mate more admirable, high-minded, exemplary—more, in short, like yourself. Or are all the human females inferior specimens like Phyllis?"

"They're—she suits me," James said doggedly.

"Of course, of course. It's very noble of you to defend her; you would have disappointed me if you had said anything else, and I honor you for it, James."

He kicked at one of the pebbles. The tree meant well, he knew, yet, like so many well-meaning friends, she succeeded only in dispiriting him. It was almost like being back at the faculty club.

"I don't suppose a clod like her would have brought any more books along," the tree changed the subject. James's own library had been insufficient to slake the tree's intellectual thirst, so he had gone all over the planet to borrow books for Magnolia. Dr. Lakin, at Base, who had formerly taught English literature, possessed a fine collection which he had been reluctant to lend until he had learned that they were not for James but for a tree. At that, he had fetched the books himself, since he was anxious to meet her.

"A lot of the trees here have learned the English language," he had told James, "but none seems to have developed a taste for its literature. Your Magnolia is undoubtedly a superior specimen. Excellent natural taste, too — perhaps a little unformed when it comes to poetry and the more sophisticated aspects of life, but she'll learn, she'll learn."

UNFORTUNATELY, the same, James knew, could hardly be said of his wife. "Phyllis did bring some books," he told Magnolia.

"For you, no doubt. That was

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kind of her. I'm sure she has many good qualities which will unfold one by one, as her meristems start differentiating. I hope you don't feel I've been too — well, personal, Jim. I was only trying to help. If I've gone too far . . ."

"Of course not, Maggie. After all—" he laughed bitterly—"I do know you better than I know her."

"We *have* been good friends, haven't we, Jim? It was rather nice—these five months we spent alone together. For the first time in my life, I have never regretted being so far from my sisters. 'And this our life, exempt from public haunt, finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything.'"

Her blue leaves shone violet in the scarlet rays of the setting sun; the gold of her trunk was lit with red radiance. She was the most beautiful creature he had ever seen . . . but she was a tree, not a woman.

"I'm sure she'll fit in after a while," Magnolia continued. "Perhaps she isn't well. She seems to guttate an awful lot. Do you suppose she's been overwatered?"

"That wasn't guttation," James said heavily. "It was tears. It means she's unhappy."

"Unhappy? Perhaps she won't fit in on this planet, in which case she should by all means go back to Earth. It's cruel and unfair to keep an intelligent — loosely speaking — life-form anywhere against her will, don't you think?"

"She'll be happy here," James vowed. "I'll *make* her happy."

"Well, I certainly hope you can manage it! By the way, do you suppose you'll have a chance to read me the books she brought, or will she be keeping you too busy?"

"I'll never be too busy to read to you, Magnolia."

"That's very nitrogenous of you, Jim. Our—intellectual communions have meant a lot to me. I'd hate to have to give them up."

"So would I," he said. "But there won't be any need to. Phyllis will understand."

"I certainly hope so. I so admire your English literature. It's so deeply cognizant of the really meaningful things in life. And if your coming to this planet has served only to add poetry to our cultural heritage, it would be reason enough to welcome you with open limbs. For it was a truly perceptive versifier who wrote the immortally simple lines: 'Poems are made by fools like me, but only God can make a tree.'

"And such a charming tune to go with it, too," Magnolia went on. "We have always sung the

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music that the wind and the rain have taught us, but, until you came, we never thought of putting words and melody together to form one glorious whole. 'A tree that may in summer wear,'" she caroled in a pleasing contralto, "'a nest of robins in her hair.' By the way, Jim, ever since reading that poem, I've been meaning to ask you precisely what are robins and do you think they'd look well in my hair, by which, I suppose the bard refers, in a somewhat pedestrian flight of fancy, to leaves?"

"They're a kind of bird,' he said drearily.

"Birds — nesting in my hair! I wouldn't think of allowing it. But then I suppose Terrestrial birds are quite different from ours? More housebroken, shall we say?"

"Everything's different," James said and, for an irrational moment, he hated everything that was blue that should have been green, everything sweet that should have been vicious, everything intelligent that should have been mindless.

SINCE matters could not grow much worse, they improved to a degree. After a day or two had passed, Phyllis, being a conscientious girl, came to realize how wrong it had been for her as a Terrestrial immigrant to show overt hostility toward a native of the planet that had welcomed her.

"But how can she be a—a person?" Phyllis wanted to know, when they were inside the cottage, for she had learned to hold her tongue when they were near Magnolia or any of her sisters, who, though they could not speak the language as fluently as she, understood it very well and eavesdropped at every possible opportunity in order, they said, to improve their accents. "She's a tree. A plant. And plants are just vegetables." She stabbed her needle energetically through the tablecloth she was embroidering.

"You mustn't project Terrestrial attitudes upon Elysian ones," James said, patiently looking up from his book. "And don't underestimate Magnolia's capabilities. She has sense organs, and motor organs, too. She can't move from where she is, because she's rooted to the ground, but she's capable of turgor movements, like certain Terrestrial forms of vegetation — for example, the sensitive plant or blue grass."

"Blue grass," Phyllis exclaimed. "I'm sick of blue grass. I want green grass."

"However, these trees have conscious control of their *pulvini*, whereas the Earth's plants don't, and so they can do a lot of things that Earth plants can't."

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"It sounds like a dirty word to me."

"*Pulvini* merely means motor organs."

"Oh."

HE CLOSED his book, which was a more advanced botany text, covered with the jacket of a French novel in order to spare Phyllis's feelings. "Darling, can't you get it through your pretty head that they're intelligent life-forms? If it'll make it easier for you to think of them as human beings who happen to look like trees, then do that."

"That's exactly what I *am* doing. And I'm quite sure she thinks of you as a tree who happens to look like a human being."

"Phyllis, sometimes I think you're being deliberately difficult. Do you know one of the reasons why I took such pains to teach Magnolia English? It was that I hoped she would be a companion for you, that you could talk to each other when I had to be away from home."

"Why do you call her Magnolia? She isn't a lot like one."

"Isn't she? I thought she was. You see, I don't know so much botany, after all." Actually, he had picked that name for the tree because it expressed both the arboreal and the feminine at the same time—and also because it was one of the loveliest names he knew. But he couldn't tell Phyllis that; there would be further misunderstanding. "Of course she has a name in her own language, but I can't pronounce it."

"They *do* have a language of their own then?"

"Naturally, though they don't get much chance to speak it, since they've grown so few and far apart that verbal communication has become difficult. They communicate by a network of roots that they've developed."

"I don't think that's so clever."

"I merely said . . . oh, what's the use of trying to explain everything to you? You just don't want to understand."

PHYLLIS put down her needlework and closed her eyes. "James," she said, opening them again, "it's no use pretending. I've been trying to be sympathetic and understanding, but I can't do it. That tree—I've forced myself to be nice to her, but the more I see of her, the more convinced I am that she's trying to steal you from me."

Phyllis was beginning to poison his mind, he thought, because it had seemed to him also, in his last conversation with Magnolia, that he had discerned more than ordinary warmth in her attitude toward him . . . and perhaps a trace of spite toward his wife?

Preposterous! The tree had

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only been trying to cheer him up as any friend might reasonably do. After all, a tree and a man . . . Nonsense! One had an anabolic metabolism, one a catabolic.

But this was a different kind of tree. She spoke, she read, she was capable of conscious turgor movements. And he, he had often thought secretly, was a different kind of man. Whereas Phyllis...

But that was disloyalty — to the type as well as the individual. The tree could be a companion to him, but she could not give him sons to work his land; she could not give him daughters to populate his planet; moreover, she did not, could not possibly know what human love meant, while Phyllis could at least learn.

"Look, dear," he said, sitting down beside his wife on the couch and taking her hand in his. She didn't draw away this time. "Suppose that what you say is true—not that it is, of course. Just because the tree has a crush on me doesn't mean I necessarily have a crush on her, does it?"

His wife looked up at him, her rose-red lips parted, her moss-gray eyes shining. "Oh, if only I could believe that, James!"

"Anyhow, she doesn't know what the whole thing's about, poor kid!"

"Poor *kid*!"

"Phyllis, you know you're prettier than any tree." That was not literally true, but reason was useless; he had to make his point in terms she could understand. "And, remember, she's got a lot of rings —she must be centuries old — while you are only nineteen."

"Twenty," Phyllis corrected. "I had a birthday on the ship."

"Well, you certainly must allow me to wish you a happy birthday, darling."

She was in his arms at last; he was about to kiss her, and the tree seemed very remote, when she drew back. "But are you sure she doesn't—she isn't—she can't be watching us?"

"Darling, I swear it!" "*Lady, by yonder blessed moon I swear, that tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops*" . . . But he had sense enough not to say it, and Elysium had not one blessed moon, but three, and everything was all right.

For a while anyway.

"I SEE your wife is developing a corm," the tree remarked, as James paused for a chat. He hadn't much time to be sociable those days, for there was such a lot of work to be done, so many preparations to be made, so many things to be requisitioned from Earth. The supply ships were beginning to come now, bringing necessities and an occasional luxury for those who could afford it.

"She's pregnant," James ex-

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plained. "Happened before I left Earth."

"How do you mean?"

"She's about to fruit. Didn't I read that zoology book to you?"

"Yes, but—oh, James, it all seems so vulgar! To fruit without ever having bloomed — how squalid!"

"It all depends on how you look at it," he said. "I — that is, we had hoped that when the baby came, you would be godmother to it. You know what that is, don't you?"

"Of course I do. You read *Cinderella* to me. I know it's a great honor. But I'm afraid I must decline."

"Why? I thought you were my —our friend."

"Jim, there is something I must confess: my feelings toward you are not merely those of a friend. Although Phyllis doesn't have too many rings of intellect, she is a female, so she knew all along." Magnolia's leaves rustled diffidently. "I feel toward you the way I never felt toward any intelligent life-form, but only toward the sun, the soil, the rain. I sense a tropism that seems to incline me toward you. In fact, I'm afraid, Jim, in your own terms, I love you."

"But you're a tree! You can't love me in my own terms, because trees can't love in the way people can, and, of course, people can't love like trees. We belong to two entirely different species, Maggie. You can't have listened to that zoology book very attentively."

"Our race is a singularly adaptable one or we wouldn't have survived so long, Jim, or gone so far in our particular direction. It's lack of fertility, not lack of enterprise, that's responsible for our decline. And I think your species must be an adaptable one, too; you just haven't really tried. Oh, James, let us reverse the classical roles—let me be the Apollo to your Daphne! Don't let Phyllis stand in our way. The Greek gods never let a little thing like marriage interfere with their plans."

"BUT I love Phyllis," he said in confusion. "I love you, too," he added, "but in a different way."

"Yes, I know. More like a sister. However, I have plenty of sisters and I don't need a brother."

"We're starting a conservation program," he tried to comfort her. "We have every hope of getting some pollen from the other side of the planet once we have explained to the trees there how far we can make a little go, and you've got to accept it; you mustn't be silly about it."

"It isn't the same thing, Jim, and you know it. One of the penalties of intelligence is a diffu-

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siveness of the natural instincts. I would rather not fruit at all than—"

"Magnolia, you just don't understand. No matter how much you—well, pursue me, I can never turn into a laurel tree."

"I didn't—"

"Or any kind of tree! Look, some more books were just sent over from Base."

Magnolia gave a rueful rustle. "Just were sent? Didn't they come over a month ago?"

James flushed. "I know I haven't had a chance to do much reading to you in the last few weeks, Maggie—or any at all, in fact — but I've been so busy. After the baby's born, things will be much less hectic and we'll be able to catch up."

"Of course, James. I understand. Naturally your family comes first."

"One of the books that came was an advanced zoology text that might make things a little clearer."

"I should very much like to hear it. When you have the time to spare, that is."

"Tell you what," he said. "I'll get the book and read you the chapter on the reproductive system in mammals. Won't take more than an hour or so."

"If you're in a hurry, it can wait."

"No," he told her. "This will

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make me feel a little less guilty about having neglected you."

"WHEREUPON the umbilical cord is severed," he concluded, "and the *human infant* is ready to take its place in the world as a separate entity. Now do you understand, Magnolia?"

"No," she said. "Where do the bees come in?"

"I thought you were in such a hurry to get to Base, James," Phyllis remarked sweetly from the doorway, wiping her reddening hands on a dish towel.

"I am, dear." He slipped the book behind his back; it was possible that, in her present state of mind—induced, of course, by her delicate condition — Phyllis might misunderstand his motive in reading that particular chapter of that particular book to that particular tree. "I just stopped for a chat with Magnolia. She's agreed to be godmother to the baby."

"How very nice of her. Earth Government will be *so* pleased at such a *fine* example of rapport with the natives. You might even get a medal. Wouldn't that be nice? . . . James," she hurried on, before he could speak, "you still haven't found any green-leafed plants on the planet, have you? Have you looked everywhere? Have you looked *hard*?"

"Haven't I told you time and

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time again, Mrs. Haut," the tree said, "that there aren't any — that there can't be any? It's impossible to synthesize chlorophyll from the light rays given off by our sun—only cyanophyll. What do you want with a green-leafed plant, anyway?"

Phyllis's voice broke. "I think I'd lose my mind if I was convinced that I'd never see a green leaf again. All this awful blue, blue, blue, all the time, and the leaves never fall, or, if they do, there are new ones right away to take their place. They're always there—always blue."

"We're everblue," Magnolia explained. "Sorry, but that's the way it is."

"Jim, I hate to hurt your feelings, but I just have to take down those curtains. The colors — I can't stand it!'

"PREGNANT women sometimes get fanciful notions," James said to the tree. "It's part of the pregnancy syndrome. Try not to pay any attention."

"Kindly don't explain me to a tree!" Phyllis cried. "I have a right to prefer green, don't I?"

"There is, as your proverb says, no accounting for strange tastes," the tree murmured. "However—"

"We're going to have a formal christening," James interrupted, for the sake of the peace. "We thought we should, since ours will be the first baby born on the planet. Everybody on Elysium will come—that is, all the human beings. Only because they *can* come, you know; we'd love to have the trees if they were capable of locomotor movement. You'll get to widen your social contacts, Maggie. Dr. Lakin and Dr. Cutler will probably be here; I know you'll be glad to see Dr. Lakin again, and you've been anxious to meet Dr. Cutler. They've been asking after you, too. I think Dr. Lakin is planning to write a monograph on you for the *Journal of the American Association of Professors of English Literature*—with your permission, of course."

"Christening — that's one of your native festivals, isn't it? It should be most interesting."

"That's right," Phyllis murmured. "It will be Christmas soon. I'd almost forgotten. It'll be the first Christmas I've ever spent away from home. And there won't be any snow or—or anything." She started to guttate —to cry again.

"Cheer up, honey," Jim said. "It won't be as bad as you think, because I didn't forget Christmas was coming. There's something specially nice for you on its way from Earth; I only hope it gets here on time." Phyllis sniffled. "Maybe we'll have a Christmas party, too. Would you like that?"

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But she remained unresponsive.

He turned to the tree. "Christening's entirely different, though," he explained. "It's—I guess naming the fruit would be the best way to describe it."

"Is that so?" Magnolia said. "What kind of fruit do you expect to have, Mrs. Haut? Oranges? Bananas? As your good St. Luke says, the tree is known by its fruit. You look as if yours might be a watermelon."

"Why, the — idea!" Phyllis choked. "Are you going to stand there, James, and let that *vegetable* insult me?"

"I'm sure she didn't mean to," he protested. "She got confused by — that zoology book I read her."

The door slammed behind his weeping wife.

"I don't think you quite understand, Maggie," he said. "In fact, sometimes I almost think you, too, don't want to understand."

"I know what kind of fruit it's going to be," the tree concluded triumphantly. "Sour apples."

"OUCH," exclaimed Magnolia, "that tickles! There's more to acting as a Christmas tree than I had anticipated from your glowing descriptions, Jim."

"Here, dear," Phyllis said, "maybe you'd better let me put the decorations on her."

"You can't get on the ladder in your condition," he said, apprehensive not only for her welfare but for the tree's. Phyllis had not taken kindly to the idea of having Magnolia as official Christmas tree, suggesting that, if she must participate in the ceremonies, it might be better in the capacity of Yule log. However, Jim knew Magnolia would be offended if any other tree were chosen to be decorated.

"I'll manage all right," he assured his wife. "If you want to be useful, you might put on some coffee and make sandwiches or something. The bachelors are coming over from Base with that equipment that arrived yesterday, and they'll probably be glad of a snack before turning in."

"The coffee's already on and the canapes made," Phyllis smiled. "And I've baked cookies, too, and whipped up a batch of penuche. What kind of a Christmas party do you think it would be without refreshments?"

"Very efficient, isn't she?" Magnolia remarked, as the battery-powered lights that James had affixed to her began to wink on, for the deep red-violet dusk had already fallen and the first moon was rising. "Have you thought, Mrs. Haut, that if you fruit today, it will save the expense of another festival?"

"I don't expect to fruit for another two months," Phyllis said

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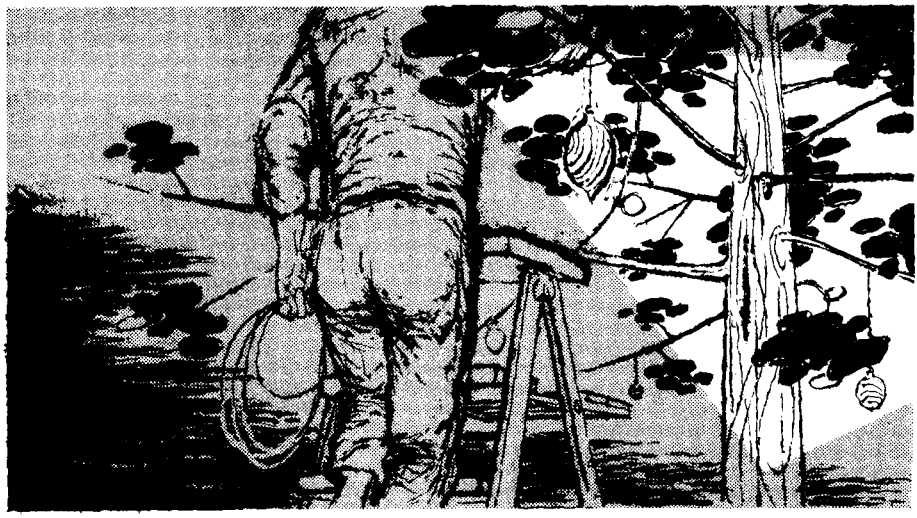

coldly, "and why shouldn't we have another festival? We can afford it and I like parties. I haven't been to one since the day I landed."

"Is the life out here getting a little quiet for you, petiole?" the tree asked solicitously. "It must be hard when one has no intellectual resources upon which to draw."

PHYLLIS held her peace for ten seconds; then, "I wonder where those boys can be," she said. "I hope they bring some pickles along. I asked to have some sent, but I'm accustomed to having no attention paid to what I want."

"There's a surprise coming for you, Phyllis," James could not help telling her again, hoping to arouse some semblance of interest. "Something I know you'll love . . . And for you, too," he said courteously to Magnolia.

"You mean the same surprise for both, or a surprise apiece?" the tree asked.

"Oh, one for each, of course."

"I see the lights of the 'copter now!" Phyllis cried and, running out into the middle of the lawn, began waving her handkerchief. He hadn't seen her so pleasantly excited for a long time.

"I don't suppose I'll need to turn on the landing lights," he said to Magnolia. "You should do the trick."

"Am I all finished?" she rustled

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anxiously. "I do wish I could see myself. How do I look?"

"Splendid. I've never had as beautiful a Christmas tree as you, Maggie," he told her with complete honesty. "Not even on Earth."

"I'm glad, Jim, but I still wish I could be more to you than just a Christmas tree."

"Shh. The others might hear."

For the helicopter had landed and the visitors were pouring out, with shouts of admiration. Not only the bachelors had come — and in full force — but some of the older men from Base, who apparently felt they could manage to do without their wives for twelve hours, even if those hours included Christmas Eve. He wondered where he and Phyllis could put them all, but some could sleep outside, if need be, for it was never cold on Elysium. The winds were gentle and the rains light and fragrant.

WHILE the visitors were crowding around Phyllis and the tree, James rooted eagerly through the packages they had brought, until he found what he wanted. Then he rushed over to the group. "I know I should wait until tomorrow, but I want to give the girls their presents now." The other men smiled sympathetically, almost as joyful as he. "Merry Christmas, Magnolia!" He hoped Phyllis would understand that it was etiquette which

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dictated that the alien life-form should get her gift first.

"Thank you," the tree said. "I am deeply touched. I don't believe anyone ever gave me a present before. What is it?"

"Liquid plant food — vitamins and minerals, you know. For you to drink."

"What fun!" she exclaimed in pretty excitement. "Pour some over me right now!"

"Not so fast, Jim, boy!" Dr. Cutler, the biologist, snatched the jug from James' hand. "First you-all better let me take a sample of this here stuff back to Base to test on a lower life-form, so's I can make sure it won't do anything bad to Miss Magnolia. Might have iron in it and I have a theory that iron may not be beneficial for the local vegetation."

"Oh, thank you!" the tree rustled. "It's so very thoughtful of you, Doctor, but I'm sure Jim would never give me anything that would injure me."

"I'm sure he isn't fixing to do a thing like that, ma'am, but he's no botanist."

"And for you, Phyllis . . ." James handed his wife the awkward bundle to unwrap for herself.

She tore the papers off slowly. "Oh, Jim, darling, it's—it's—"

"You wanted a bit of green, so I ordered a plant from Earth. You like it? I hope you do."

"Oh, *Jim*!" She embraced him and the pot simultaneously. "More than *anything*!"

"It won't stay green," Magnolia observed. "Either it'll turn blue or it'll die. Puny-looking specimen, isn't it?"

"Well," said James, "it's only a youngster. I guess this Christmas is too early, but next Christmas there ought to be berries. It's a holly plant, Phyl."

"Holly," she repeated, her voice shaking a little. "*Holly*." She and Dr. Cutler exchanged glances.

"I told you, Miz Phyllis, ma'am —he may know the first thing about botany, but he doesn't know anything after that."

"Jim," Phyllis said, linking her free arm through his, "I misjudged you. Dr. Cutler is right. You don't know so very much about botany, after all."

HE LOOKED at her blankly. Her voice was trembling, and not with tears this time. "I love this little plant; it's just what I wanted . . . but there aren't ever going to be any berries, because, to have berries, you have to have two plants. And the right two. Holly's di—dio—it's just like us."

"Oh," James said, feeling thoroughly inadequate. "I'm sorry."

"But you mustn't be sorry. I'm going to plant it here on Elysium,

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and I hope it will stay green in spite of what she says, and it'll have blossoms anyway . . . and it was very, very sweet of you, dear."

She kissed his cheek.

"Is this one a boy or a girl?" Magnolia asked.

"You-all can't tell till it blooms, Miss Magnolia, ma'am," Dr. Cutler informed her.

"Maybe I can. Hand it up here, please."

Phyllis paused for an irresolute moment, then, smiling nervously at her guests, obliged.

"It's a boy," Magnolia announced, after a minute. "A boy." She gave back the pot reluctantly. "Phyllis," she said, "you and I have never been friends and I admit that it's been my fault just as much as yours."

"As much as mine?" Phyllis echoed. "I like that—" and was going to go on when she obviously recollected that they had company, and stopped.

"So I know it's presumptuous of me to ask you a favor."

"Yes, Magnolia?" Phyllis said, her fine cornsilk eyebrows arched a trifle. "What is this favor?"

"When you plant the little fellow — you said you were going to, anyhow — would you plant him near me?"

Phyllis looked down at the plant she held cradled in her arms and then up at the tree. "Of course, Magnolia," she said, frowning slightly. "I didn't realize . . ." Her voice began to tremble. "I *have* been pretty rotten, haven't I?" She looked toward James, but he turned his glance away.

"Just because you were a plant," Phyllis continued, "didn't mean I had to be a b-b-beast. It must have been awful for you, seeing me like this, practically crowing over you, and knowing that you yourself would never have the chance to be a m-m-mmother."

"'Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,'" Magnolia said sadly, "'and waste its sweetness on the desert air.'"

PHYLLIS was crying unashamedly now. "I'll plant him right next to you—Maggie. I want you to have him. He can be your baby."

"Thank you, Phyl," Maggie said softly. "That's very . . . blue of you."

"Although I think that's a jimdandy idea," the biologist said, "and I sure wouldn't want to do anything to discourage it, being real interested in the results of an experiment like that my own self, I don't think you ought to feel so mean about it, Miz Phyllis. If all she wanted — begging your pardon, Miss Magnolia, ma'am—was a baby, why didn't

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she take an interest in the holly until she found out it was a male? Why wouldn't a little old girl holly have done as well?"

"Why — why, you scheming vegetable!" Phyllis exploded at Magnolia, clutching the holly plant to her protective bosom. "He's much too young for you, and I'm going to plant him far away, where he can't possibly fall into your clutches."

"Now, Miss Phyllis, we-all mustn't look at things out of their proper perspective."

"Then why did you take your hat off when you were introduced to Miss Magnolia, Cutler?" Dr. Lakin asked interestedly.

"Sir, where I come from, we respect femininity, whether it be animal, vegetable or mineral. Nonetheless, we-all got to remember, though Miss Magnolia is unquestionably a lady, she is not a woman."

Phyllis began to laugh hysterically. "You're right!" she gasped. "I had almost forgotten *she* was only a tree. And that *it* is only a little Christmas holly plant that's probably going to die, anyway—they almost always do."

"That's cruel, Phyllis," James said, "and you know it is."

"Do you really think I'm cruel? Are you going to tell the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Vegetables on me? But why am I cruel? I'm giving her the holly. That's what she wants, isn't it? Do you hear that, Miss Magnolia, ma'am? *He*'s all yours. We'll plant *him* next to you — right away. And I hope *he* doesn't die. I hope *he* grows up to make you a good husband."

"SHE'S really quite remarkable," Dr. Lakin said to James later that same evening, after the planting ceremonies were over and the rest of the party had gone into the cottage for fresh coffee and more sandwiches and cookies and penuche. "Quite remarkable. You're a lucky man, Haut."

"Thank you, sir," James replied abstractedly. "I'm sure Phyllis will be pleased to—"

"*Phyllis*! Oh, Mrs. Haut is a very remarkable woman, of course. A handsome, strong girl; she'll make a splendid mother, I'm sure. But I was referring to Miss Magnolia. She's a credit to you, my boy. If for no other reason, your name will go down in the history of our colony as that of the guide and mentor of Miss Magnolia. That's quite a tree you have there."

James looked at the dark form of the tree—for the lights had been turned out — silhouetted against the three pale moons and the violet night. "Yes, she is," he said.

"You're fortunate to be her

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neighbor . . . and her friend."

"Yes, I am."

"Well, I expect I'd better join the rest. Are you coming on in, Jim?"

"In a little while, sir. I thought I'd — I wanted to have a word with Magnolia. I won't be long."

"Of course, of course. I'm delighted to see that there is such an excellent relationship between you . . . Good night, Miss Magnolia!" he called.

"Good night, Dr. Lakin," the tree replied, politely enough, but it was obvious that she was preoccupied with her new charge, who stood as close to her as it was possible to plant him and yet allow room for him to grow.

THE door closed. James walked across the lawn until he was quite near Magnolia. "Maggie," he whispered, reaching out to touch her trunk—smooth it was, and hard, but he could feel the vibrant life pulsing inside it. Certainly she was not a plant, not *just* a plant, even though she was a tree. She was a native of Elysium, neither animal nor vegetable, unique unto the planet, unique unto herself. "Maggie."

"Yes, Jim. Don't you think his silhouette is so graceful there in the moonlight? He isn't really puny—just frail."

"Maggie, you're not serious about this holly?"

"What do you mean?" And still he didn't have her full attention. Woud he ever have it again?

"Serious about raising him to be your—your—"

"Why not, Jim?"

"It's impossible."

"Is it? It certainly is far more possible with him, isn't it? That much I understood from your zoology books."

"I suppose so."

"Besides, I have nothing to lose, have I?"

"But even if it were possible, wouldn't it be humiliating for you? The creature's mindless!"

Magnolia's leaves rustled in the darkness. She was laughing — a little bitterly. "Your Phyllis isn't your intellectual equal, Jim, and yet you say you love her and I suppose you do. Am I not entitled to my follies also?"

But she couldn't compare Phyllis to a holly plant! It was unreasonable.

"He may die, of course," Magnolia said. "I've got to be prepared for that. The soil is different, the air is different, the sun is different. But the chances are, if he survives, he'll turn blue. And if he turns blue, who knows what other changes might be brought about? Maybe the plants on your Earth aren't inherently mindless, Jim. Maybe they just didn't have a chance. 'Know ye the land where the cypress and

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myrtle are emblems of deeds that are done in their clime...?' That land isn't Earth, Jim, so it might just possibly be Elysium."

AGAIN he didn't say anything. What he wanted to say, he had no right to say, so he kept silent.

"It'll be a chance for me, too, Jim. At least we're both plants, he and I. That gives us a head-start."

"Yes, I suppose it does."

"Intellect doesn't count for much in the propagation of the species. Life goes on without regard for reason, and that's mainly what we're here for, to make sure that life goes on—if we're here for anything at all. Thanks to your kind, Jim, life will continue on this planet; it will certainly be your kind of life—and I hope it can be ours as well."

"Yes," he said. "I hope so, too."

And he did, but he wished it didn't have to continue in quite that way. Perhaps it was a trick of the three moons, but the holly plant's leaves seemed to have changed color. They were no longer green, but almost blue — powder blue.

"You'd best be getting on to your party, Jim," Magnolia said. "You wouldn't want to be remiss in your duties as host. And please close the door gently when you go inside. The little holly plant's asleep."

As he closed the door carefully behind him, he heard a burst of laughter coming from the kitchen, where the guests apparently had assembled — raucous animal laughter — and, rising shrill and noisy above it, Phyllis's company laugh.

—EVELYN E. SMITH

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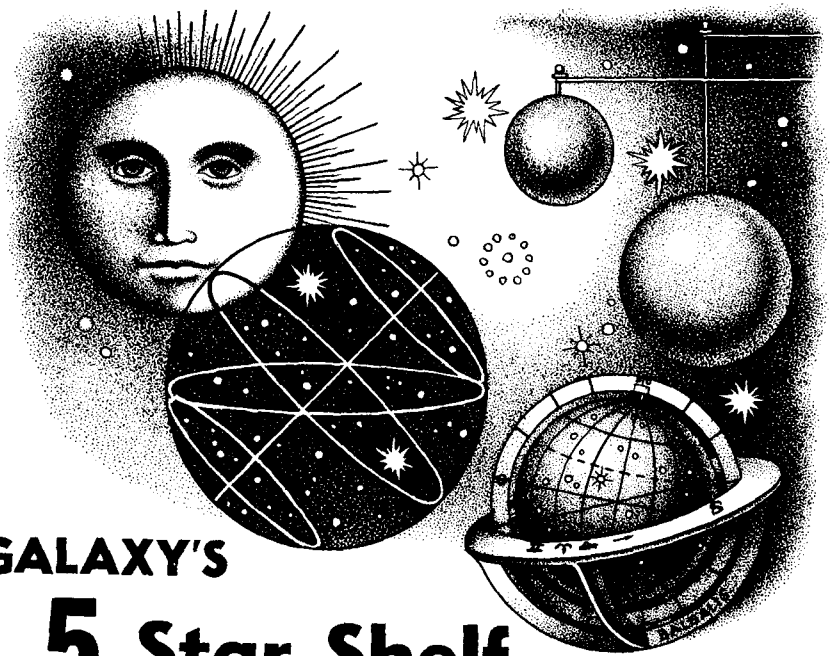

GALAXY'S 5 Star Shelf

NO BOUNDARIES by Henry Kuttner and C. L. Moore. Ballantine Books, 35c

ACCORDING to the brief biography at the rear of this book, the Kuttners have stopped writing under myriad pseudonyms.

High time, too. Fifty per cent of active readers were convinced that fifty per cent of active authors were the Kuttners.

This collection is representative of their talent for creating and maintaining mood as in "Vintage Season," "Two-Handed Engine" and "The Devil We Know:" with the rollicking "Exit the Professor" thrown in as a change of pace. "Home There's No Returning" is the only low mark in the book, but suffers more through comparison with its companions than through faults of its own.

The previously mentioned brief biography is a little gem of wit and information. The author of that should not remain anonymous or pseudonymous.

Recommendation? You should read it.

The Kuttners should get back into production again!

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MARTIANS, GO HOME by Fredric Brown. E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., $2.75

BROWN claims that all writers since Wells have overlooked the obvious. Martians are not huge-chested spindles, pink lizards or any of the other innumerable shapes pictured by science fiction. They really *are* Little Green Men!

The story's hero, a science fiction writer named Luke Devereaux, retires to a California desert shack to recover his writing touch miles from civilization. He thinks he is unique, therefore, when he is visited by a two-and-a-half-foot green Martian who turns out to be as nasty an individual as you never met.

It develops, however, that all over Earth at the same instant, a billion Martians have made themselves obnoxiously known. They "kwimmed" to Earth and that is the extent of the information that they will impart. For the rest, being of basically cruel nature, they deliberately cause nervous breakdowns, suicides and destruction of world economy.

Fortunately, they are visible and audible only, not otherwise material. Also, they appear and disappear at will, do not use individual names, and address all males as "Mack" and all females as "Toots." Their knowledge of idiomatic language is fantastic and their interest in the human sex life insatiable. Unfortunately, they possess both night and X-ray vision, so that the human birthrate falls off alarmingly the first year of their invasion, even in France.

There are spots where the author got carried away by his narrative, but he succeeded in writing a very funny book.

THE WORLD WE LIVE IN by the Editorial Staff of Life and Lincoln Barnett. Time Inc., and Simon & Schuster, Inc., $13.50

THIS large, handsome book contains the complete series which ran in *Life* in thirteen installments for over two years. If you were one of those who attempted to save the individual issues in which it appeared, only to have pages ripped and lost and copies mislaid, you will be happy to have this permanent record.

For those who have never seen it in periodical form, I quote the introduction by Vannevar Bush, wartime Chief of the Office of Scientific Research and Development:

"It is not a treatise but a modest volume of text richly illustrated which will captivate the imagination of millions of non-scientific people who would not

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otherwise concern themselves with its subject matter."

I heartily agree. The illustrations are profuse and magnificent. The text is inclined to floweriness, but it doesn't get in the way of the pictures, which are guaranteed to absorb the interest.

The total time covered by the contents is some fifty billion years, from the birth of Earth four to five billion years ago, to the heat death of the Sun thirty to fifty billion years in the future.

Altogether, it's as intriguing a natural history book as I've ever seen under one cover and more than adequately proves the truth of the old saw about one picture being worth at least a thousand words.

MAN AND THE WINDS by E. Aubert de la Rue. Philosophical Library, $6.00

EVERYONE knows how the wind has influenced history through the invention of the sail and, of course, these days the entire world watches the path of a modern hurricane or typhoon, but how many people know the intimate story of local winds and their influence in subtle ways on human life?

The author takes us to many localities, mainly European, where virtually the entire behavior of the inhabitants has been determined by the vagaries of atmospheric disturbances.

According to the jacket, the publishers believe this to be the first book written on the winds as they affect mankind. It doesn't need that distinction to qualify as a rewarding book on an unusual subject.

EXPERIMENTS IN THE PRINCIPLES OF SPACE TRAVEL by Franklyn M. Branley. Thomas Y. Crowell Company, $2.00

THE author, a science teacher in a New Jersey college, is also the author of two science fiction juveniles, *Lodestar: Rocket Ship to Mars* and *Mars.* The present book, addressed to the 12-year-and-up audience, is a brain-prodding exposition of the problems Man must expect to arise from his projected first trip into space.

From the first chapter on the question of destinations to the last concerning the problem of gravity, the author sustains interest, not only with his text, but with the demonstrative experiments he suggests.

I found that my young son, Ricky, was not only eager but capable of conducting the experiments with the simple household materials the author suggests.

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MEN, MICROSCOPES AND LIVING THINGS by Katherine B. Shippen. The Viking Press, $3.00

THIS intimately written book concerns itself with the vital discoveries of men who were forerunners in their fields, from Aristotle, the first biologist, through Darwin, and down to Weismann and Morgan, of gene and chromosome fame.

Each vignette, and there are a score of them, records the highlights in the lives of men who changed biology from superstition to the science it is today.

The book is handsomely illustrated in line by Anthony Ravielli. It is intended for teen-age audiences, but even a well-informed adult is sure to find fascinating bits of new information.

THE MOON by H. P. Wilkins and Patrick Moore. The MacMillan Company, $12.00

BOTH authors are Fellows of the Royal Astronomical Society. In addition, Dr. Wilkins is director of the Lunar Section of the British Astronomical Association and Moore is its secretary. With that background, the reader can expect as authoritative a book on the subject as can be published. He is not disappointed.

The book features — and, in fact, is built around — the famous revised 300-inch lunar map of Dr. Wilkins. To those readers who are not familiar with the map, it is possibly the most detailed record of the Moon's face in existence.

The introduction takes the reader from the history of Selenography to a general survey of surface details and classification, and speculates on the causation of observed changes which would tend to prove that the Moon is *not in a state of suspended animation.*

The following twenty-five sections deal with the individual portions of the map as segmented by the authors. As they state, the book is meant primarily for observers. However, anyone who has ever looked at the Moon with appreciation will find the book a source of provocative information. Besides marvelously detailed sections of the map, there are fine lunar photographs and enlarged drawings of some of the more spectacular features.

There follows a series of appendices, the most valuable of which covers lunar photography, a subject which the amateur knows through sad experience is badly neglected. If the reader ever intends to purchase a telescope, this book will serve both as incentive and guide.

—FLOYD C. GALE

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The Moralist

By JACK TAYLOR

Aye, 'tis a difficult thing to be a lady on a far world — but who needs them there?

Illustrated by WEISS

THERE ARE exceptions to almost every rule and Xenon was one of them. The rule in this particular case was the old cataloguers' adage that cataloguing duty was never pleasant, often dangerous and always hard. Xenon is the fourth planet of one of the stars investigated some seven or eight years ago by the battleship *Terra* on her swing around the edge of the Black Hole.

Unequipped for exploration, the *Terra* hadn't bothered to land on the planet, but instead had taken only the usual gravitational and atmosphere readings and then had continued on her long mapping patrol. She had slowed just long enough to send back her report on tight beam to Venus Relay Station and propose the name of Xenon, "the unknown." After all, a planet with point nine Earth gravity and almost twenty per cent oxygen in its atmosphere was well worth a name rather than a number.

About a year later, the preliminary exploration ship arrived and spent several weeks mapping

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and testing this, that and the other thing. Then she went home and wrote her report — and what a report it was! The thing read like a Chamber of Commerce bulletin that had been sponsored by a subdivider. All it needed was a couple of ads offering some choice business locations for sale and it would have been complete.

The planet was perfect, the climate was perfect, the soil fertile. There were no natives or hostile life to bother a man. The forests were wide, the plains were broad and the numerous rivers were not only full of fish but also emptied into blue seas that were just as full of fish as the rivers. That report was enough to make a man quit his job and go to Xenon to start a chicken ranch or grow oranges.

THE BUREAU of Colonization acted with its usual speed. Three years later, a cataloguing group landed from the supply ship *Hunter*. The duties of the groups are simple enough; they determine which of the food crops known to Man can best adapt themselves to the conditions found on the particular planet under examination. They list the native flora and fauna, minerals and resources. They chart the weather and its cycles and, in general, try to determine if Man can exist there and, if so, if the planet is worth the expense, trouble and danger of colonization.

Most planets are not worth it, but Xenon was.

And now the group had returned with its final report and its recommendations. The report? Xenon was perfect, just perfect. The recommendations? Immediate colonization, but be careful who is sent so that place isn't spoiled by a bunch of land-grabbing exploiters who might not appreciate the place.

They had been back nearly a week before Lee Spencer had time to come to my place for the weekend. Due to a combination of my wife's cooking and a sedentary desk job with the Bureau, I was beginning to have a bit of difficulty in bending over far enough to zip on my shoes in the mornings, but Lee was still as lean and fit as he was the day he blasted off for Xenon nearly four years before.

He had been given the full returned-hero treatment, complete with press conferences, testimonial dinner, audience with the Coordinator — everything. He hadn't had a waking moment to himself since he landed, so I suppose that might have been one reason that he relaxed so completely in front of the library fire after dinner and talked more than he perhaps should have. Or

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the generous slug of the old brandy my grandfather left me may have had something to do with it.

At any rate, he was in an expansive mood that night after Martha had filled him with one of her always excellent dinners and I had nearly floated him in Grandfather's brandy.

We had a lot of "do you remember" man talk to catch up on and after enduring nearly two hours of conversation about people and happenings of which she knew nothing, Martha gave up and headed for the stairs.

"You two can talk all night if you want," she announced over her shoulder, "but I'm going to bed. Breakfast on the patio about nine or so, Lee."

"I'll be there, Marty. Sleep tight."

"Not as tight as you will, I'll bet," she grinned. "There's another jug in the kitchen if you think you may need it."

WE HEARD her bedroom door hiss as it slid closed and sat for a moment looking into the fire and listening to it whispering secrets to itself.

"She's a pretty nice wife, Sam," he told me.

"Thanks. I like her, too."

"Not at all like Prunella."

"Prunella?" I said. "I don't think —"

"Well, that's what the boys at the station began calling her a couple of days after she landed. Behind her back, of course."

"I still don't know who —"

"You know, the niece of that windbag in World Congress that you featherheads in the front office sent out to replace Pop Jensen when he fell out of that tree and had to be sent back to Earth for hospitalization."

"Oh, *that* one. Look, Lee, I didn't have anything to do with her selection. She was appointed by the Old Man himself. Understand there was some kind of pressure on him from the top."

"I forgive you, Sam, but I rather doubt if some of the other people of the group will for a while."

"How come she didn't stay?" I asked. "Political pressure or not, I can't imagine the supervisors sending out an incompetent replacement."

"Incompetent?" he almost snorted. "Prunella was the most belligerently competent female that it has ever been my misfortune to run across. Prunella was efficiency personified, make no mistake about that. She was — or is — a top-flight botanist and had led several expeditions here on Earth, but she couldn't realize that Xenon wasn't Earth. She tried to live by the book as she had here, but in spite of the gen-

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eral excellence of the *Spaceman's Handbook,* her methods didn't work so well."

I primed him with another two fingers out of the bottle and sat back to listen.

"Good brandy," he said. "I made some once on Xenon, but Prunella put a halt to that in a hurry, just as she did a lot of other things. The trouble with her was that she was always insufferably right. Every blasted time! And she was right again when she pointed out that if we were to come under attack, the products of the little distillery might impair our efforts to defend ourselves. My still went under the ax."

HE SIGHED and then went on. "She neglected to say what might attack us or where this enemy might come from, since men are the only animals to achieve space flight thus far and there was nothing on Xenon that was hostile to us.

"But I'm getting ahead of my story," he told his glass. "It probably all started when she arrived. We had been looking forward to the day, but none of us more than Joe, our cook. Joe was that rare find, a man who took pride in his work and worked with pride. Joe, I firmly believe, could barbecue a spaceman's boot so that it would taste like steak. He considered Prunella and her arrival a fine opportunity to show what he could do when he really wanted to.

"For her first meal with us, Joe had prepared Prunella a feed from every edible native fruit, vegetable and meat that he could lay his hands on. It was the same stuff that we had been getting fat on for nearly two years, but did we eat any of his cooking that night? Not a bite," he answered himself. "I thought she was going to toss a fit right there and then.

"'Gentlemen,' she said, 'you know as well as I that consumption of any native product of a strange planet is expressly forbidden by the *Spaceman's Handbook of Survival* until these products have been thoroughly investigated and passed upon by the proper authorities. Therefore, we shall eat the synthetics that have been provided for us until these have been examined by the labs on Earth.'

"She was right, of course," Lee went on. "Many poor devils have died in agony because they were foolish enough to eat some luscious-looking fruit before it had been checked. We tried to tell her that our lab monkeys and cats had eaten and liked everything on the table, as had we, but we still had to send samples to Earth. That was two years ago

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and they still haven't handed back a report."

He sighed again and this time didn't wait for me to pour for him.

"So we ate synthetics, but you know how they are — every morsel filled to the brim with everything a man needs to live on indefinitely, except one thing — taste. It almost broke Joe's spirit, he fixed the stuff for us in every way known to mortal Man. No matter how thin he sliced it, it was still synthetic and still had that flavor of a well-aged gluepot."

Lee ran his tongue over his lips, as though the taste were still in his mouth. "There were countless little incidents such as that," he said, "none of them important, but they all added up to a constant irritation and resentment among the men. Maybe it was easygoing Pop Jensen who spoiled us. I don't know."

LEE THOUGHT for a moment or two. "Then there was the time a water-pup nuzzled Prunella while she was taking a lone swim in the river that ran near the station. She spent all morning on a sandbar in the middle of the river before the school of pups tired of their play and left long enough for her to consider it safe enough to swim back to the river bank."

He grinned to himself. "Sam, those pups are as harmless and friendly and playful as any pups of Earth, but Prunella didn't know that and none of us could convince her of it. She said that the pups might be dangerous, under some unknown circumstances which she didn't define, then quoted us a passage from the *Handbook* which prohibited fraternization with any native life-forms until friendly relations were established. She evidently didn't consider being nuzzled a friendly act. Ergo, no more swimming and that was an order."

He made another trip to the brandy bottle, then sank back into the deep chair again. "But the most exasperating thing Prunella pulled on us was the inspections every morning before we left on our daily field trips. We had all been on Xenon long enough to know what equipment we needed to carry, right down to the last specimen box, but what we carried and what the *Survival Handbook* said to carry were two different things. That is, they were two different things before Prunella began her inspections. We had found long before that all of the gear prescribed by the *Handbook* was heavy, most of it was useless, none of it necessary on Xenon. It might be of some use on some other planet, but we didn't need it there. So, as a con-

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sequence, we didn't lug much of that junk around over the landscape with us."

"None of it?" I said.

"Well, almost none. But after Little Miss Efficiency began making her morning spot checks, we left the compound each day looking like a picture of what the well-dressed man on a strange planet will wear. We carried everything in the book and a few more that Pruny thought up all by her little self. In addition to all the survival, signaling and first-aid equipment that dangled and jangled from various parts of us, we also carried enough offensive and defensive weapons to start and maintain a war of no small size.

"Granted, the first-aid and radio paraphernalia might be handy in some way, but blasters, needle-guns, knives, defense shields and all the other apparatus struck as being a little on the ridiculous side, especially since neither we nor the men before us had found a single life-form on Xenon that would attack Man. Or rather, with one exception, none of them would and a blaster or needle-gun was of no use on *that* one."

I FOLLOWED my cue. "Really? And what was this mysterious exception?" I thought I was playing straight man for some elaborate joke, but Lee was serious.

"Damn it all, don't you people even read your own directives? I'm talking about the powder puffs. Does *that* mean anything to you?"

Seeing my blank look, he explained resignedly, "The powder puffs are the way the Xenon equivalent of Earthly mushrooms takes to spread its spores. They have some unpronounceable Latin name, but we called them powder puffs because, oddly enough, that's what they looked like. The puffs are little round balls of a very light fluffy material, with the spores adhering to small fibers on the surface. The things are carried by the winds over great distances and when they finally come down, they bump along, leaving a dusting of spores on anything they touch."

"They don't sound very dangerous," I told him.

"They aren't then. It's the next step in their life cycle that makes them a nuisance. You see, Sam, if they don't come in contact with some substance containing moisture and a high percentage of nitrogen, the spores lie dormant. Can you think of any substance fitting those requirements better than a nice warm mess of living protein?"

He grinned at me ghoulishly.

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"Don't look so horrified, Sam. I'll bet credits against chalk that you're host to at least one kind of fungus right now. Do you have athlete's foot?"

He was thirsty again and took steps to remedy such a deplorable situation. "The puffs are only another type of fungus, even though they do cause more trouble than most. The animals on Xenon are immune from them, but when they land on a man, they send out tiny rootlets that are like minute hairs. These go into the nearest capillary and start taking the nitrogen they need from the blood. After a week or so, they drop off and continue their cycle. I'm told that a man can be practically covered with the varmits and his nitrogen balance won't be disturbed enough to bother him."

"Then why worry about them?" I asked as he paused a moment.

He didn't seem to hear me. "Those puffs would be just another annoyance except for the fact that those little rootlets evidently work on the nerve endings of the body just enough so they don't hurt but itch instead and, brother, how they do itch! Makes you wish you had four more hands and someone else to help scratch."

He squirmed in remembrance. "I understand some of the earlier men dug out divots of flesh to get rid of the intolerable itch and to keep from going crazy. It's that bad. Good thing, though, that the spores can't live inside the body. Can you imagine having an itch like that in your lungs?"

ANOTHER sip and then he continued. "You'll forgive me if I seem to wander from La Prunella, but you have to understand the powder puffs to know why she left our bed and board so suddenly.

"Of course, it's true all of the old-timers on Xenon had been puffed at one time or another, but just to prevent a repeat performance, we all, including Prunella, wore that protective goo you people sent out to us a few years ago. Works pretty well. You build up a considerable immunity after the first attack of puffs and more after each succeeding one, but that's the hard way. The goo is easier." His voice trailed off as, with a surprised look, he noticed his glass was again empty. This time he brought the bottle back with him. "But to get back to Pruny. Well, the men were getting pretty fed up with Prunella's arbitrary ways and her morning inspections, but the last straw was when she shot Johnny, the station's pet Me-too bird that we had raised from almost an egg. Same as humans,

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Johnny had his little faults and foibles, but we loved him in spite of them.

"One of those faults was the reason Johnny lived outside the dome instead of inside with the rest of us, as he would have liked. We never let him stay inside for any length of time because he was never able to understand why floors should be clean and kept that way. So Johnny's nest was on top of the ultra-wave tower and that's where he spent most of his time when he wasn't lazily riding around on the shoulders of one of us or panhandling Joe, the cook, for something extra to eat.

"He was in his nest when Prunella got him with that delicate-looking, deadly little needle-gun of hers. I'll bet he had a hundred of those tiny slivers of steel in him. One would have been enough, but she must have set the gun on full automatic and then let it spew itself empty."

I made sympathetic noises.

"She said afterward that Johnny had been a possible disease carrier and, besides, he was dirty. There was absolutely no doubt about it — Johnny *was* dirty and in more ways than one, but as for diseases, Xenon seemed to have none that the human race hadn't already overcome on some other planet far more dangerous than this one."

I LAID more wood on the fire as Lee paused to sip and roll the brandy.

He said, "I've always suspected, however, that the real reason for Johnny's assassination struck Prunella, so to speak, like a bolt from the blue when she walked under his nest in the tower. At any rate, I saw her shoving her shirt into the disposer chute. Johnny had one bad habit and all of us knew better than to get within his range, but Prunella, being new with us, just didn't understand that bird."

He stopped, twirling his empty glass suggestively, with painful memories obviously clouding his eyes while he stared into the hypnotically flickering fire.

"Empty," he said mournfully, "just as my heart was." He bowed his head to Johnny's memory as I hastily left him alone with his grief. I quickly returned from the kitchen, bringing a fresh supply of the medicinal spirits that Grandfather had advised for moments of stress and, over Lee's feeble protests, forced a generous dosage into his glass. He regarded it with a wan, pathetic smile, then, at my urging, choked back his sorrow and nearly drained the goblet in a manful gulp. Grandfather was right. The sorrow left Lee's eye and from somewhere he found new courage to go on.

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"The death of the bird seemed to crystalize the rebellion. That night, the entire personnel of the station unanimously elected themselves as joint chairmen of the Ways and Means Committee of the Xenon Anti-Prunella and After-sundown Elbow-bending League and immediately called a special meeting. The emergency session convened around a keg of my illegal brandy which, in some miraculous manner, had escaped Prunella's searching hatchet. Not wishing to offend the unknown gods who had thus smiled upon us, we took small token sips as we meditated."

Lee demonstrated with the glass in his hand. "How to throw off the yoke of the oppressor who had come among us? How to ease the bite of her lash on our quivering backs? How to restore our tiny, inoffensive still whose musical, tinkling drip we loved so well? The suggestions put before the committee that night were many and varied and wonderful."

Lee tried to light a cigarette and nearly broiled the end of his nose with the flame.

"Lopez, head of our camera team, wanted to pickle her in a barrel of brandy and send her back to Venus Relay Station aboard the next courier rocket. Sounded like a good idea, too, until Olsen, one of the biologists, objected on the grounds that those bums on Venus never did anything for us, so why should they get all that good brandy? The motion was tabled as impractical when we saw the pit into which Lopez and his wild ideas had nearly led us. A whole barrel of brandy! The man must have been desperate to call for such extreme measures."

HE SHOOK his head. "Akermann, the chemist of the bunch, proposed smoking her as one would a ham and then hanging her over the main gate of the compound to keep away the beasties and things that go boomp in the night. Now *that* was what I thought a fine idea. Functional, you might say. Might as well get some good out of her. But then Joe smothered it with his observation that, after one look at that face of hers, the good beasties would stay out of the compound, too.

"The dark and devious ways of the plotter were difficult for us to assume, scientists and technicians that we were, and the trips to the keg became more frequent as we sought the aid of the nameless gods who had sent it to us." He paused again as Grandpa's brandy took another beating. "The web of our own fuzzy thinking was entangling us more and more when I was privileged to be present during the

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only true flash of genius I've ever witnessed."

The wonder, the awe was still in his voice. "Akermann's assistant, the Kid, was singled out for the touch and I must say for him that he held up very nicely under the blow, but one could see that his sudden responsibility set heavy on his narrow bony shoulders. The Kid drew additional inspiration from the glass in his hand, then leaped to his feet and as promptly sat down again. He gave the decking at his feet a baleful glare and tried again, first choosing his footing carefully as a man should when the floor shows that alarming tendency to tilt."

"'Men,' he said owlishly, 'le's fix it show see — I mean so she — won't like it here an' maybe she'll go 'way. Le's set the puffs on her.'

"'On her what?' someone wanted to know.

"'On her nuthin'. Just on *her!*' the Kid said.

"'Oh.'

"There was another mass assault on the speedily diminishing supply of illicit brandy while the committee prayed to the gods of the spacemen for guidance. The committee decided to consider the motion.

"'Wunnerful idea,' Akermann beamed at his protege, 'but how you gonna get 'em to bite through that protective goo she dunks herself in every mornin'. Just how you gonna, huh?'"

I NODDED. "How about that?" I asked Lee.

"The Kid was ready with an answer. 'Do y' know why we wear clothes made only of vegetable or synthetic fibers and not any animal wool, hide or fur?'

"'Sure, any fool knows that,' Akermann said. 'The cotton lobby had a law passed.'

"'I'm serious,' the Kid told him disgustedly.

"'Howdy,' our learned chemist said happily, sticking out his hand. 'I'm Akermann.'

"The Kid must have finally decided that his boss was even more advanced in brandy shock than he was if it was possible — and it was. He picked another chemist, Harry North, as his new straight man and, squinting one eye a bit in an effort to keep him in focus, said, 'Harry, do *you* know why we don't wear wool 'n stuff like that?'

"'Sure,' Harry answered. 'The *Handbook* says animal fibers are protein an' if the puffs get a foothold on any article of clothing made of 'em, then their rootlets c'n penetrate most any kind of goo an' fasten into the guy that happens to be so stupid. Then someone has to give him the treatment to keep him from

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scratching right down to the liver an' lights.'

"The Kid's punch line was trying to get out so bad that he was about to blow a tube. 'That's right, Harry,' he smiled patronizingly. 'Now if Prunella was to wear somethin' like that, do y' spose the puffs would get 'er?'

"Harry was still puzzled. 'Sure they would, but she's not gonna do it. *Handbook* says not to, n' even gives a long list of stuff *not* to wear. Nope, she won't.'

"'I know there's a list, but one nitrogenous fiber didn't get on it. Silk is a protein — fibroin — but it's not on the list.'

"'Silk? Why should silk be on the list?' Martin, a big, beefy physicist, was red-faced and indignant. 'It's too expensive and fragile for ordinary wear an' besides, no self-respecting spaceman *I* ever knew would be caught dead in a silk undershirt or a silk anything else! What d'you think those guys are, a bunch of women to go around wearing sil —' He stopped abruptly, staring at the Kid with something like awe. 'Do you think we can get 'er into something made of silk?' he asked humbly, as befits a man when he speaks to a superior being.

"There was a respectful silence as the group waited for Mr. Paulson, formerly the Kid, to speak.

"Mr. Paulson clapped his hand over his mouth, said 'Urp' between his clenched fingers, turned a remarkable shade of green and looked about him like a trapped animal. A few of his admirers led him through a small door, no doubt to worship silently at his feet while he rested after his soul-shaking ordeal. It was clear that Mr. Paulson had given his all for the cause."

LEE SAID, "The door slid shut on Mr. Paulson's pain-racked exit, its latching hiss drowned by the simultaneous demand of the committee, individually, for the attention of the committee, collectively. Each of them considered himself the sole person present capable of carrying on the great work for which Mr. Paulson had so nobly sacrificed himself. Ordinarily sedate doctors of this or that gibbered at each other in an arm-waving, frenzied attempt to be heard.

"In a matter of seconds, half the committee had the other half backed into chairs, against tables and into corners, earnestly explaining in a conspiratorial roar just how Prunella was to be enticed into wearing the silken booby-trap.

"The committee gradually shouted itself into a red-faced, thirsty semi-hoarseness only to find a demon — ne Shulman, our top botanist — guarding the inspirational keg with a heavy

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stool and promising a swift and personal drought to any man who didn't shut up on the spot. I need not say that we shut nor that order was fast in coming among us.

"In the comparative quiet that followed, there was a rapid-fire shifting of ideas, deleting some, adding to others, and Prunella was doomed. The plot wasn't *too* thick. It depended only on the fact that an expert's eye was needed to detect the difference between sheer Enduron, the newest and best of the synthetic fibers, and sheer silk. By the same token, the reverse was true. That is, given silk, one could easily mistake it for Enduron.

"The services of a woman on Terra were necessary to us, so Sparks magnanimously recruited his young sister, a writer or artist or something of the sort, who lives somewhere in southern Europe. All she had to do was buy a dozen pairs of the fluffiest, frilliest, most outrageously feminine silk undies she could find in the most chi-chi shop in Paris and then send them to Prunella with a note honoring her as the first woman on Xenon and asking Prunella to accept them as a token of admiration from one woman to another. Some fictitious name was to be signed to it.

"We raided the office, obtained Prunella's file and copied out the proper measurements from it. Sparks fed the message, measurements and a blank signed photocheck into the coder and the automatic ultra-wave transmitter took it with a swift *blip* of sound and that was that."

I WAITED for Lee to catch his breath, which he did by inhaling from a full glass. Then he continued talking.

"All this occurred about the middle of Xenon's third month. We expected the skivies to arrive on a supply ship due the first of the following month, which gave us nearly three Earth weeks to wait, but we didn't mind. After all, we had something to wait *for*.

"The ship, bless the crew, was on schedule almost to the hour. Adams had had his wide-angle 'scope aimed at the sky above Xenon since long before breakfast, and he and the detectors ran a dead heat when the ship winked out of sub-space about two million or so miles out.

"By mid-morning, the ship's gravitors had floated her into the field for the usual feather-light landing, and mail call, always the first order of business, was over.

"Women have a well-deserved reputation for dawdling over trifles when important matters wait, but that morning Prunella broke all previous records. She

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gossiped with the ship's captain about interminable bills of lading, she inspected the field for any possible damage by the ship, she swallowed enough coffee to start a fair-sized shortage. Finally, just in time to save the station from a mass nervous collapse, she left the office for her quarters, carrying her mail in one hand and that small, all-important package in the other.

"She reappeared for lunch wearing the tiny smile of a woman who knows she is appreciated by *someone* and, we hoped, also wearing something else not quite so visible. Never was one so closely watched by so many. If she looked distressed, we gloated. If she squirmed in her chair, we rejoiced. Her every move was analyzed for possible puff symptoms.

"Prunella, that evening, dined as the captain's guest aboard ship. In the mess hall, with Mr. Paulson installed in the seat of honor, the arguments were long, loud and heated: She had 'em on. She didn't. The puffs had her. They didn't.

"I hadn't realized there were so many synonyms for fool and idiot or so many genteel ways to sneer until my learned colleagues that night debated the case of the puffs versus Prunella. We went to bed still in an agony of indecision."

LEE WAITED for me to be appropriately sympathetic. I obliged.

"The next morning, Prunella had breakfast alone in her quarters, but then she often did. Or I should say she ordered breakfast sent and then ate only a little of it and sent it back. A short while later, Prunella left her room, went to the library and returned to her quarters with a spool of microfilm in her hand. All the people who could cram into the tiny library cubicle were in before the hiss of Prunella's closing door died away. A wild rape of the library files improved our digestions, dispositions and belief in the ultimate triumph of good over evil — Prunella had withdrawn the film on 'Effects of Xenon Life-forms on the Human Body.'

"I learned later that some far-sighted soul had added lurid details to the section of the film dealing with the puffs, describing minutely what one could expect after powder puff infestation. Odd thing about a few of those added details — some of the more horrible ones had never been noticed before nor have they been reported since.

"Prunella went aboard the supply ship *Hunter* shortly after noon, scratching determinedly in several places that no lady should, at least in public.

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"The captain, most of his loading done and seeing her dire need, blasted off for Terra immediately and flipped into sub-space much closer to the planet than he should have. Prunella was on Terra that same night, Xenon time. The captain told me on his next trip that Pruny had commandeered both quarantine nurses at Polar Space Field to work on her. It still took the two women several hours to finish, according to him. She must have been covered with the things. Bet she looked as though she were sprouting fur."

"One thing I don't understand," I told Lee. "You kept referring to a 'treatment' of some kind for the powder puffs. Didn't Prunella know about it? If she did, I don't see why she didn't take it on Xenon. Surely, at the risk of being insubordinate, you didn't deny it to her if she had ordered it."

"Quite the contrary, Sam. Prunella knew all about the 'treatment.' And in spite of your suspicions as to our hard hearts, many of us offered our services after leering in what we hoped was a suggestive manner. You see, Sam, the mysterious treatment consisted of nothing more than a very close examination of every square centimeter of the skin with a high-power magnifier and using a pair of fine tweezers to pull out the puff rootlets. But in addition to all of Prunella's other faults and/or virtues, Prunella was a prude."

We drank a silent toast to pure womanhood.

— JACK TAYLOR

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In the Cards

By ALAN COGAN

It is one thing to safeguard the future . . . and something else entirely to see someone you love cry in terror two years from now!

Illustrated by EMSH

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THE FIRST thing I did when I bought my Grundy Projector was take a trip to about two years ahead and see what was going to happen to me. Everyone was doing it around that time; students were taking short trips into the future to learn whether or not they would pass their exams, married couples were looking ahead to see how many kids they were going to have, businessmen were going into the future to size up their prospects.

I took the trip because I was getting married and I couldn't resist the temptation of finding out how things would work out with my fiancee Marge and myself. Not that I had any doubts about Marge, but the Grundy Projectors were guaranteed harmless and there's no point in taking chances with a serious step like marriage.

Everybody was looking ahead then. Within a week after the Grundy Projectors were introduced, you could walk past homes every evening and see people with those shimmering bird-cages around them. Their bodies were there, but heaven knows when their minds were—months and

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often even years ahead of time.

I knew exactly when to go on my first time trip. I even knew where: I'd already put a down payment on a home in the new dome housing area where Marge and I would be living after the wedding. Knowing where to go on a time trip is important. On this one, for instance, I hadn't been assigned an address yet and there were all sorts of changes in the place—buildings and streets where there had only been empty lots and sections marked off by string—and I just had to hunt until I came to our home.

You can imagine how much more difficult finding my future self would be if I hadn't known the exact location. That's about the only major drawback to making time trips and I don't see how it can be overcome. Directories would be one answer, but how would you go about putting them together if your crews can't ask questions or touch filing cards or even open future visiphone books?

EVENTUALLY, after setting the dial around the two-year mark, which is about the maximum limit on most models, I found myself in my future home in the dome housing area. I was watching myself as I would be and Marge as she would be. Only I didn't like what I saw.

We were fighting and screaming at each other. You could tell at a glance that we hated each other. And after only two years!

I was completely stunned as I watched that scene. Future Marge looked furious; she had the kind of look I never even suspected she could get on her face. But I think I was more enraged at my future self than at her. At the time, I was seriously in love with Marge—although it seemed evident it wasn't going to last—and I loathed myself for acting that way toward her. And after all those rash promises I had been making, too!

I was really a tangled mess of emotions as I watched our future selves battling it out.

I became conscious of not being alone as I watched. It didn't take long to discover that it was Marge who had come to join me. I should have expected her — she must have been just as curious about her marriage as I was and, like myself, would naturally take her Projector to the two-year limit. Of course we couldn't hold hands the way we would have if our bodies had been there, but then we probably wouldn't have held them long. We were both pretty embarrassed by what we saw.

The cause of the fight was very obscure, and though we saw and heard everything perfectly, we

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still didn't really understand. However, the emotions expressed were plain enough.

"You aren't going to die, Marge," my future self was yelling at her. "Try and get that through your damned thick stupid skull!"

"I am! I am!" she was screaming back at me. "You know I'm going to die. You want to get rid of me. Our marriage has been one long fight from the start."

"Don't talk such damned rot," my future self hollered back at her. "There's probably a perfectly good explanation for it all and you're too ignorant to see it!"

"The only explanation is that I'm going to die," future Marge insisted. She broke down, sobbing into an already saturated handkerchief.

My future self stamped around the room, cursing and furiously kicking the furniture. "Why don't you find out for sure? Why don't you go in closer and find out the real reason?"

She sobbed even louder. "I daren't! You do it for me. Go find out for yourself and then tell me."

That seemed to make my future self even madder. "You know I wouldn't touch one of those things even to save my life. I mean it, too! Besides, if you do die, it'll be your own fault. You'll have *believed* yourself to death! You think you're going to die and now you won't be happy until you *are* dead."

Future Marge began to sob hysterically and *my* Marge, who had been right beside me, suddenly seemed to grow a little more remote.

Then a strange thing happened. My future self stopped pacing up and down the room and turned to look straight at me with the queerest expression on his face. That was enough for me. I got out of there fast and flipped back to the peace and security of 2017.

I CLIMBED out of my Grundy Projector, glad to be back in the relative calm of my body, although it still took me a long time to get settled down. I felt like smashing the Projector there and then, and I guess I should have done it.

The problem that had me all tied in knots was whether or not I should go ahead and marry Marge after what I had seen. I know it looked as though I was going to marry her anyway, but in my innocence I figured I could beat that.

I soon realized I was going to get nowhere sitting all by myself in my room, so I went over to Marge's place. She was waiting for me, swinging quietly to and fro on the hammock on the dark

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patio. Normally I would have sat right down beside her, but this time I just stood back sheepishly and waited.

Neither of us said anything for a while and I just watched as the hammock floated in the faint bluish light from some nearby lamps. Marge seemed to shine almost angelically as the glow caught her dark eyes and her softly tanned arms and legs.

I COULD have whipped myself for treating her the way I had seen myself treating her in the future. It must have been a mistake. There had to be a mistake somewhere. I couldn't have made myself do anything to hurt her.

Her voice was husky and scared when she spoke. "Do you think it'll happen the way we saw it, Gerry?" she asked.

"I don't know," I said. "They say that whatever you see always turns out to be the thing that happens."

"Do you think we'll fight like that when— if we're married?"

It was on the end of my tongue to talk common sense and logic to her, but then I realized that neither of us wanted to hear anything like that. We were in love and we didn't want to hear anything that conflicted with our emotions.

Marge sat up in the hammock and made room for me to sit down beside her.

"I just don't see how it could happen to us," I said. "I don't see how *we* could fight like that. There must have been some mistake. Maybe we looked in on the wrong people."

Neither of us added anything to that. We both knew we weren't going to change so much that we couldn't recognize ourselves two years later.

"Maybe it was some sort of alternative world we saw," I suggested, eagerly clutching at any straw, "showing us what could happen if we didn't work hard at our marriage. It could have been a sort of warning of what *could* happen to some people. But not us, of course!"

Marge's lonely little hand crept into mine for comfort and I began to warm up to the subject.

"Don't you worry about it," I assured her. "What would *we* ever find to quarrel about?"

The idea seemed so preposterous, we both began to laugh.

"I couldn't fight with you, Gerry," Marge said, snuggling closer.

"Me, neither," I said. "Don't worry about what we saw. The scientific boys will probably have a rational explanation worked out for the whole thing. I'll bet it's happened to lots of people."

Somehow, while we were talking, we had managed to get very

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close together in the hammock. Marge and I could never talk far apart for long.

"I couldn't wait for you to come over," Marge said in a small voice.

"I couldn't wait to get here," I lied. "I just don't believe that what we saw could possibly happen to us. What on Earth would *we* ever find to fight over?"

That was the one basic mistake that we, and everyone else, made when we discussed the Bilbo Grundy Projector. When the Projector showed you something was going to happen, it happened.

That night, Marge and I made plans to get married even sooner and the ceremony took place four weeks later.

GRUNDY'S PROJECTOR had been a well-kept secret until it suddenly burst upon us with a carefully planned publicity campaign. There hadn't even been a hint of experiments in the time-travel field until the discovery had suddenly been made public in the newspapers and on the TV screens of the whole world.

Grundy had discovered a way of projecting a person's view into the future and the equipment required turned out to be amazingly compact, simple and inexpensive. The average cost of a Projector was fifty-five dollars—well within practically anyone's price range.

Grundy and his backers had lined up a large number of famous people beforehand, all of whom had tried the Projector and were only too willing to tell us how great it was. Terrific fun—the newest thrill since the first radio, or the first airplane, or the first space rocket. And absolutely harmless, too!

All you had to do was set a dial and get into the cage and you could watch yourself an hour or a day or up to two years ahead of time. If you wanted to see if it was going to rain that weekend, all you did was climb in and take a look. If you wanted to see where you would be going for your annual vacation, just press a button and you would see yourself making the final plans. All for fifty-five dollars. What with all the advertising coming at us via every possible medium, Grundy sold a million in the first five days.

Because he knew exactly how many he was going to sell—just by making use of his own invention—Grundy was fully prepared for the onslaught of customers.

Everyone talked of nothing but the new sensation. You couldn't go anywhere without hearing about it. It seemed as if the rest of the world had stopped.

Before long, there wasn't a thing about the next two years that we didn't know. We all

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jumped ahead in great leaps and found out all kinds of things that were due to happen to us and to the world. If the things were good, we waited happily for them to happen. If things didn't look too good, we shrugged it off, like Marge and me, and said it couldn't happen to us.

BUT that was the catch. Whatever we saw happening did take place exactly as we saw it — it was inescapable. The first instance I saw of this was in the accountanting office where I operated an accounts analyzer. We advertised for a new operator to assist in my department and lined up interviews with thirty-two applicants. When the day of the interviews arrived, only one applicant turned up. He was found suitable and got the job.

The president, Mr. Atkins, was pretty het up about the whole affair. "Why would thirty-one men not present themselves for interviews as they had arranged?" he kept asking me. "It's a good job, isn't it, Gerald?"

I tried to explain to him that the Time Projector was probably involved in the affair, although I couldn't see *how* exactly. Mr. Atkins was an old man who didn't believe in new gadgets of any kind and he wasn't convinced. Finally, however, I managed to get him to call some of the applicants and ask them why they had not appeared for their interviews.

He almost went apoplectic when he heard the reasons. Each of the thirty-one answered that he had flipped ahead to see what was going to happen on that particular day and each one had seen that he *wasn't* going to visit Mr. Atkins in search of a job, so he didn't go. Some of them even told him that they knew they were going to get jobs elsewhere on a certain date and that they were just taking a vacation until that day came.

I had a hard time soothing Mr. Atkins that afternoon. He wouldn't stop talking about it. Finally, just to satisfy himself, he re-interviewed the sole successful applicant. As we should have expected, the new man answered that he had looked ahead to see that he was going to get the job and had dutifully made his appearance.

Mr. Atkins was flabbergasted and he spluttered and fumed for minutes on end. Then he looked crafty. "What am I going to do now?" he asked the new man.

"You're going out to get drunk, sir," the new man answered.

And that's exactly what Mr. Atkins did.

CRAZY situations like that became commonplace in no time. The newspapers were filled

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with them every day, though it still took us quite a while to understand that there was nothing we could do to avoid the inevitable. It was all pretty staggering and naturally we protested like madmen. Naturally it didn't do a bit of good. It was in the cards that we would protest without results.

Even when we did get quieted down, we were still in a daze because of the weird things that were happening. For instance, there was this fellow on our street who suddenly became famous for writing a best-selling novel.

For ten years, he had been writing without selling a word and then suddenly he broke into the big time with a best-seller. Everyone asked him how he had done it and he calmly explained that he looked into the future and saw himself with a popular novel to his credit. He found out what the novel was about and then came back to his own time and wrote it and his success worked out exactly as he had seen it on his time trip. No one could say that he hadn't written the book himself.

My kid brother Willy was in first year medicine when he looked ahead and saw that he wasn't going to be present at the term-end exams, so he just didn't bother to attend. He stayed in bed that day. He didn't want to be a doctor, anyway—I think he only started it for my mother's sake. A lot of people argued with him and said if he had only gotten out of bed that morning and gone to school, the prediction would have been proven false.

The only answer to that, of course, is that Willy just *didn't* get out of bed that morning, thus proving the prediction *true*.

We argued for weeks over that one. It doesn't matter now—Willy is a 'copter mechanic and crazy about the work. After all, he didn't have the slightest difficulty getting a job. He simply looked ahead to see where he would be working and then applied.

Inevitably, some people found out when they were going to die. Even when they took steps to forestall the grim event, they often discovered that their plans actually helped them arrive at their demise right on the button. But most people died of old age anyway, what with all the latest developments in safety engineering and medicine.

Nevertheless, it meant that fate was having its own way as usual, with the difference that we knew everything beforehand and remained just as helpless!

ONCE we all realized for sure that the predictions were one hundred per cent accurate, all

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kinds of changes affected our lives.

For a start, a lot of people automatically found their jobs had disappeared overnight—weather forecasters, news analysts, pollsters, stock-market speculators, and all the people connected with any form of racing, betting, lotteries or raffles, to name only a few. Gambling, respectable or otherwise, requires someone to win and someone to lose—and who'd be willing to lose on a result he already knew?

A few new jobs were created by others who looked ahead and foresaw such things as earthquakes, fires, floods, volcanic eruptions and violent storms. They set up special teams for handling these disasters, evacuating people and removing valuable property beforehand.

This explained why, as we looked ahead, we saw fewer and fewer deaths occurring from these tragedies. The growing efficiency of the rescue services worked wonders—which were part of the future, as you'd expect, not successful attempts to change it — although there were always a small number of deaths, mainly the kind of people who never used to pay any attention to the news, didn't look at road signs, and the like.

Some of them belonged to the crowd who opposed Bilbo Grundy's fabulous invention. They were strictly a minority but, as is usually the case, they were a pretty noisy and outspoken bunch. They were a mixed lot, too, made up of people who had foreseen their deaths or personal disaster, those who had lost their jobs through the invention, a number of cranks who habitually were against everything, plus a few, like myself, who just didn't feel easy about the Projector.

I couldn't see that time travel was evil or sinful the way some of them described it and I never attended any of their protest meetings, but I did sympathize with them to a certain extent. Everyone called them the 'Die-hards' and the stock remark was that they should look into the future to see if their movement was going to be a success before they got too involved in it.

That drove them wild.

MARGE spent a lot of time with her Projector. The device was very popular with women, mainly, I guess, because it was the absolutely perfect fortune-telling device and it was much more fun than either video or visiphone conversations.

I put my own Grundy Projector away in the basement shortly after I got married and I never used it any more. To my way of thinking, it made life pretty dull.

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I had just been married and I was also starting to get ahead at my job—Mr. Atkins had put me in charge of a whole department full of accounts analyzers. I went around with all sorts of wild plans and dreams of a rosy future for us. I hoped someday to form my own company and I was also interested in finding a better place to live. The dome housing development was only temporary as far as I was concerned and I wanted something bigger for when we could afford a family.

I suppose we all have those dreams of success when we're young, and though most of us have fairly predictable futures, I still can't help thinking that it's those wild dreams and schemes that keep us slugging away and add a little zest to life. Anyway, I soon found that Marge was knocking all the zest out of my life because she *knew* the future for both of us and she kept telling me about it.

It took me a few weeks to finally persuade her that I'd rather not know what was going to happen. But it was too late then, because she'd told me everything that was important.

For instance, I knew I was going to be living in the dome house for another two years and probably more. I knew I was still going to be working for Mr. Atkins and I knew just how much money I was going to have in the bank at the end of two years. I even knew that my paunch would get bigger and my hair would start falling out.

Life got to be just a matter of sitting around waiting for the expected to happen.

I TRIED hard to break Marge of the time projection habit, but it was useless. She was as addicted as everyone else and the Grundy Projector looked as though it was going to be here for good and no one was going to stop it.

After all, who could prevent an expectant mother from jumping ahead a year or so to find out whether she is going to have a boy or girl? I know the doctors can tell with one hundred per cent accuracy in the second month, but the parents-to-be still want to find out if Junior will look like Mom or Dad.

Or who could prevent a young boy and girl from finding out whom they were going to marry? New methods of courting appeared — if you could call it courting. A boy would merely look ahead and find out who the lucky girl was going to be and then call on her. She was usually sitting at the front door waiting for him, too. I kind of liked the old-fashioned way, when Marge

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and I met by chance one day and then spent months getting to know each other.

Of course it was impossible to avoid knowing future news whether you wanted to hear it or not. The newspapers, in trying to beat each other to scoops, could only find good headline material among the Diehards; the rest of us all knew what would happen to us. Most of the papers carried two separate sections—one for future events and the other for present "news."

We still had crime with us. The crooks who knew they were going to jail always went there at the appointed time, regardless of their elaborate precautions and so-called foolproof systems. Others who knew they were going to stay free for a couple of years at least led fabulously successful lives of crimes, made more daring by the fact that they knew they were temporarily safe from the law. The police, on the other hand, never bothered to chase these characters, knowing in advance that they weren't going to catch them anyway.

This naturally set the Diehards to hollering. For a time, they talked of forming vigilante groups to do their own policing, but nobody worried about this. It was in the cards, you see, that they weren't going to do it.

The final blow to the Diehards came during the Federal Elections of 2017, when the Neo-Republicans just got up and walked out of office and the United North-South Democrats walked in without a single election speech being made. I know a few votes were cast, but everyone knew what the results would be long before it happened.

The part that annoyed the Diehards so much was that it was *their* handful of votes that decided the results.

TOWARD the end of the first two years, Marge and I began to have our first samples of that bitter quarrel we had both witnessed on our first time trip. I had almost forgotten about what I had seen, but soon I saw how I was going to be taking part in such quarrels quite frequently.

Marge just wouldn't stop making those time trips and it seemed to me she spent hours every day in her Projector. There was something in the future that worried her and, naturally that worried me, too. I was almost tempted to get my own Projector out of the basement and find out for myself. Marge was beginning to look sick and pale all the time. She got much thinner and weaker and I knew she cried a lot when I wasn't around.

I tried my best to find the cause of the trouble, but I got

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nowhere. Trying to cheer her up with little surprises was a waste of time. It's no fun trying to surprise anyone who knows better than yourself what the surprise is going to be.

Finally, when out of desperation I had almost decided to take my first time trip in nearly two years, I came home from the office to find Marge sobbing hysterically beside the Projector.

"We're going to die, Gerry!" she said, when I managed to get her fairly coherent. "I've been looking ahead for months now and I just don't see us *anywhere* in the future!"

So there it was. I didn't know what to do or say. I was scared and mad and sorry for Marge for keeping such a secret bottled up inside herself for so long.

The first thing I said was, "There must be a mistake—" until I remembered that there were *never* any mistakes with Grundy Projectors.

NEVERTHELESS, I still tried to find a way out of the situation. "Maybe you couldn't find us because we moved," I said quickly. "Maybe I got another job and left town or was transferred to the Boston office. Mr. Atkins has mentioned it a couple of times."

"I looked," Marge said miserably. "I looked everywhere and I just couldn't see us anywhere."

"But how do you know we're going to die?" I argued. "Did you see it happen?"

She shook her head. "I didn't dare look that close. I got it pinned down to somewhere in the next month and I didn't dare look any closer, afraid I might have to see something horrible. All I know is we just won't be around sometime after the next four or five weeks."

"Has anyone mentioned anything to you about our death?" I asked. It was considered improper to even hint at another person's death just in case that person hadn't found out. Still, you know how tactless some people can be.

Marge just shook her head and went right on sobbing.

"Listen," I said, "I'll bet you're getting all worked up for nothing. Anything — absolutely anything — could happen in the next few weeks. There's probably a perfectly simple explanation for the whole thing."

I guess I wasn't very convincing because Marge just stared dumbly at me, tears spilling out of her eyes. "Gerry, would — would you go and look? If it's something harmless, you can come right back and tell me. If it's something awful, I won't ask about it."

"No," I said. "That would be just the same as telling you what's

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going to happen. Besides, I don't *want* to know."

We just sat around the house for the rest of that evening. After Marge had gone to bed, I went down to the basement and smashed both our Bilbo Grundy Time Projectors into little pieces. I'd seen the hopelessness and despair in people who had learned just how and when they would die. Smashing the things wouldn't change the future — I realized that — but I didn't want Marge obeying the impulse to find out. Or myself, for that matter.

SHORTLY after that, the quarreling started in earnest. Marge wouldn't let up on the business of dying, and as well as being scared, I was also sick of hearing about our short and questionable future. Marge was furious with me for destroying her Projector and blamed me constantly for making her suffer by preventing her from looking into the future.

"Now we won't know what's going to happen until it's too late!" she shrieked at me.

"That's right!" I yelled back. "And that's just the way I want it! What's the use of knowing and worrying in advance if there's no way of doing anything about it?"

Then, one night, we had the identical fight that we had watched two years earlier, on our first time trip. Marge, as usual, was crying hysterically about not having long to live and I was shouting at her about wishing herself into the grave. She seemed to have forgotten that I was going to go, too, and had taken all the suffering on her own shoulders.

When I was hollering and stamping about the room, I had a funny, eerie feeling as I suddenly remembered that my younger unmarried self had watched — or was watching — the same scene.

I just stopped doing anything for a moment and stared around the room. Naturally I saw nothing, because there was nothing to see, and I remembered how quickly my younger self had fled when I had looked up like that. Ashamed, I tried to soothe Marge, but she was too far gone to be comforted.

I was glad to get out of the house every day and spend a few hours at the office. I must admit that I was scared to be with Marge because it looked as though we were going to go together and I felt safer away from her. I know it's nothing to be proud of, but it helped ease the tension, for Marge as well as myself.

One day, Mr. Atkins stopped in at my office and sat down to talk. There was nothing unusual

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about this; he often visited me for a chat, even though he wasn't so friendly with the other employees.

We talked for a while about the usual things, department business and some of the staff members.

Then Mr. Atkins turned the conversation away from business matters. "Do you have one of those newfangled Time Projector things, Gerald?" he asked. Mr. Atkins was getting on in years and called everything introduced in the last thirty years "newfangled."

"No," I said. "I did have one,

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but I stopped using it soon after I got it."

"Didn't you like it?"

I shrugged. "It wasn't that. I just preferred to find out for myself what would happen to me." I didn't want to tell him the true story or my other troubles.

Mr. Atkins sat back in his chair and sighed. "Ah, yes. I don't suppose you remember too much about the old days, not after the last two years we've been through. People had problems in those days and they used to have to solve them for themselves. People don't have to make decisions any more, you know. Do you think you could still make a decision, Gerald?"

I GOT a little excited and found it difficult to stop fidgeting and stay quietly seated. I began to suspect that he was leading up to something important. It could have been the transfer to another branch or an out-of-town assignment which would explain our disappearance in the future.

"I still try to make plans and direct my own future whenever I can," I stalled.

"It's difficult, I know," Mr. Atkins went on, "especially when all the news is about something that's going to happen a day or a week or a year from now. It's not so bad for an old man like me, but it must be tough on you young fellows. Too bad this Bilbo —uh—"

"Grundy," I said. "Bilbo Grundy." Mr. Atkins knew the name as well as I did, but it was one of his little tricks to pretend he was getting old and forgetful, although he really wasn't. It used to be a good business tactic before the Grundy Projector came out. It wasn't any more—not with people being able to see outcomes of dealings—but he couldn't get rid of the habit.

"It's too bad he had to invent that fool time gadget," he went on. "I suppose your wife uses it all the time. They seem to be very popular with women."

"Marge gave it up a short time ago," I lied. "She got bored with it."

Mr. Atkins nodded thoughtfully. "Wouldn't it be nice to live in an age again when none of us knew what was going to happen? When life had lots of surprises—both good and bad? When you could get up in the morning and not be sure what was going to happen before night? Would you like that, Gerald?"

I didn't know what to say. He was off on that wandering-mind routine and I didn't know for sure whether he was really rambling or not.

"I think I'd like it, Mr. Atkins," I said. "As long as everyone else was in the same boat."

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"*Would* you like it?" He was suddenly looking at me with the shrewd, out-of-the-corner-of-the-eye expression he had when he was handling some wealthy client's intricate income tax problems.

"I mean it," I told him. "I'm tired of living among people who know my business two years ahead of time."

"I can get you to a world like that," he said quietly.

I didn't say anything in reply. Who could?

"I have some friends," he went on, "who make a practice of helping people like yourself to better things."

"What do you mean by 'better things'?" I asked warily.

"I'm talking about time travel, Gerald. The real thing—not the Bilbo Grundy toy, but real physical time travel. These friends have gone a lot further than Grundy did with his invention and they perform the service of transporting people to a better age."

"You mean the future?"

"The past!" said Mr. Atkins. "The chances are the future will be even worse. I'm talking about the middle of the last century, around the nineteen-fifties or thereabouts."

I began to laugh. "The nineteen-fifties! What would I do to earn a living in those days?"

HE GAVE me a thin smile. "I guess that would be your first unsolved problem. After all, you said you wanted problems and the chance to make plans and try to make them come true."

"But why pick me?" I wanted to know.

"I like you, Gerald," he said. "I would like to see you have a decent chance. And don't flatter yourself — you wouldn't be the first one to go. You'd be in good company."

I just sat staring vacantly at him.

"I guess you could say this is your first big decision in two years," he added. "There's no hurry. You can think it over for a while."

I asked questions—lots of them — but I didn't get too many answers. Mr. Atkins explained that naturally the affair was hush-hush. After the way the Grundy Projector had been thrust so irresponsibly upon us, no one wanted any further complications. But there were some answers I could piece together both from what I already knew and the hints he dropped.

I'd been in on conferences and listened to Mr. Atkins try to figure out ways of expanding, building up our business. Each time, he'd been stymied by the Grundy Projector. If he'd bull some idea through, his competitors would

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see exactly how it worked out. If he didn't, they'd know that, too. And I had heard him rant when the accountants — using the Grundy Projectors, of course — would make up their inventory, sales, profit-and-loss and tax statements two years or more in advance.

That was actually what galled him. Mr. Atkins was used to making plans, calculating risks and gains, taking his chances. With the Grundy Projectors in existence, nobody could do that any more. I gathered from what he told me that there was a syndicate of men like himself backing

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the inventor of a genuine time machine. They didn't condemn the Grundy invention on any moral or religious or even selfish grounds. They just resented very bitterly the same thing that annoyed me—the sense of repetition.

As Mr. Atkins put it, "It's no different than reading a story and then having to relive the whole thing, anticipating each action and bit of dialogue. And that's precisely what this is. Only it's our lives, not fiction. We didn't like it, Gerald. We didn't like it at all! But we did something about the problem instead of merely complaining."

Let me say right now that I thought the solution they came up with was nonsensical and I kept searching, all the time we talked, for ways of politely turning down the offer. Escaping to to the past was a ridiculous answer. But it was just the kind of notion that would appeal to an old-fashioned character like Mr. Atkins.

I didn't tell him so, of course. I thanked him for his consideration and shook hands and felt relieved when he finally left.

MY MIND was made up by then. I'd back out, quit if I had to, rather than take refuge in the past to evade the future.

It wasn't until I got out of the office that I realized there was no big decision to make; it was already made for me. Either I was going to die or I was going into the past — and I wasn't going to die if I could help it. But neither did I intend going into the past if I could really help *that*!

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When Marge realized that I wasn't merely trying to take her mind off the fatal day, she pounced on me and hugged me as though I myself had invented the time machine just to save her life!

"It's wonderful, darling!" she cried. "You were right all along! Oh, how can you forgive me for making things so unbearable for you?"

"About this idea of going into the past—" I said.

"What's the difference when we go to," she cut in, "as long as we don't have to die?"

"But I figured on telling Mr. Atkins at the last minute that all I want is a transfer—"

"What's the sense of guessing?" she asked excitedly. "All we have to do is borrow a couple of Projectors and *see*!"

I began to feel myself being squeezed into a one-way trap. I put my foot down—but where it landed was in a Grundy Projector from the people next door—and where it figuratively emerged was eleven days later, when I couldn't shut my non-physical eyes to the way the whole situation would turn out.

Marge and I, with half a dozen others, were getting into a helicar. I followed them out to a house in the country. We handed in all the money we had saved and in return were given old-style clothes, ancient-looking money and a small amount of luggage. Then we all stepped into what looked like an oversized version of a Grundy Projector and vanished.

Fight? Argue? Scheme?

I didn't have a chance.

IT WAS 1956 when we arrived in old New York. We were met by others who had pioneered the way before us and they looked after our group until we learned the ropes.

There was nothing easy about getting used to the era. I wished often that I could get back to my own time, Grundy Projector or no Grundy Projector. Still, Marge didn't complain; she was prepared to endure anything just because she thought her life had been saved. Occasionally, bothered by my blunders in adjusting to this past century, I'd start to reason with her, explain that her life hadn't been in danger at all. But then, luckily, I would realize that convincing her would leave an angry, dissatisfied wife on my hands and I always managed to stop in time.

I got a job working as a night janitor in a bank and studied accounting in the daytime until I was able to get a steady job. We've been here a few years now and I guess you could say we're pretty well assimilated. We

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have a house and two small sons and I'm doing well at my job. We still see some of our friends from the 21st century and they've also managed to make the change successfully.

We get together now and then, and talk over old times, and laugh at some things and get nostalgic over other things. Now that there aren't any Grundy Projectors around, we've started feeling once more that our fates are in our own hands.

Rog Owens has an interesting viewpoint. He said one night, "It wasn't the future that was fixed; it was the Grundy Projectors that fixed the future! Whatever people saw would happen, they just let happen . . . or even worked to make it happen. No matter what it was, including their own deaths. Hell, how's that any different than voodoo?"

That was pretty much how each of us had felt, only we hadn't figured it out so clearly. But Rog Owens has a special reason for thinking particularly hard about the problem. Mr. Atkins and his syndicate hadn't send us back for purely altruistic reasons; they learned that Rog's daughter Ann would marry a fellow (not one of us) named Jack Grundy and that they'd have a son named Bilbo, who would invent the Grundy Projector. Our assignment was to keep that from happening.

Well, we couldn't prevent the marriage, but we could — and did — make sure their son would have a good, plain American name. It's William Grundy.

But today my younger boy told me their kindergarten teacher calls William "Billy Boy."

And one little girl can't pronounce it. She calls him Bilbo.

—ALAN COGAN

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(*Continued from page 4*)
the rest lost weight, occasionally to the point of emaciation. But that merely proves they wavered in their knowledge of why they felt hungry. The ones who died were just not trying.

Eating is a habit (compulsive ritual) forced on us in childhood. Most children seem to be "poor" eaters, indicating they know why they feel hungry and so don't have to eat. The fault, of course, is the parents' for forcing them.

Not-breathing used to be a monopoly of East Indian fakirs. Houdini and others have shown that anyone can do it. But their method, suspended animation, is only half-knowing why we breathe.

According to the textbooks, we breathe so that we can bring oxygen to the blood cells and remove waste products. Superstition, obviously. When we breathe, the alleged waste products removed are *displaced oxygen molecules*, shoved along by newcomers; two things can't occupy the same space at the same time.

Here, too, the cause is to be found in childhood: we are spanked at birth for not breathing.

There's no point wasting time discussing sleep — it's a heritage from our primitive ancestors, who had nothing else to do at night — or day, if they were nocturnal.

Breaking any rituals as entrenched as these always creates a sense of impending doom. ***But it can be done.*** That is the thing to keep in mind.

There are so many ways in which the formula can be used that the real question is where to start.

Spaceships — we could dispense with food storerooms, galleys, air recirculation, sanitation, heat control, gravity, bunks — everything but hull and motive power.

War — maybe the enemy won't buy the formula, but our knowing why fission, fusion and bacteria warfare kill would make them non-lethal.

Disease — they could all be laughed out of existence in a matter of minutes.

Immortality — right at our fingertips.

Overpopulation — one generation to bring under control.

Poverty — who, knowing why he felt poor, would be poor?

Economics — if we know why we want to make and buy things, we don't have to.

The last item bothered me, I admit: idle people are bored people. But would they be, if they knew why they felt bored?

Lord, what a discovery! But how is it that I know why I *feel* elated and still *am* elated?

—H. L. GOLD

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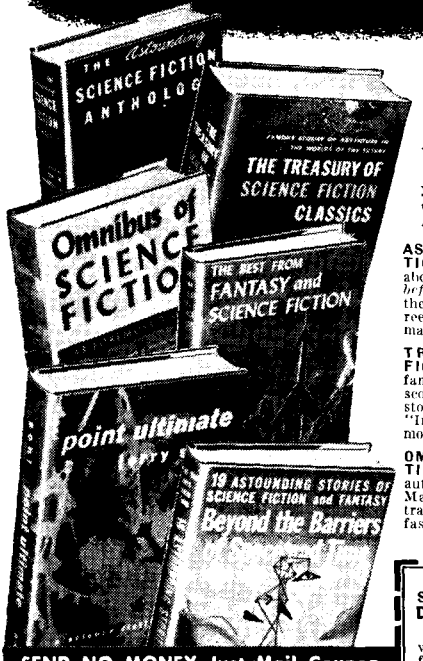
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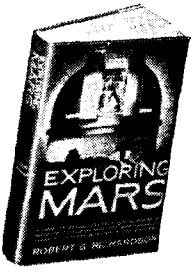

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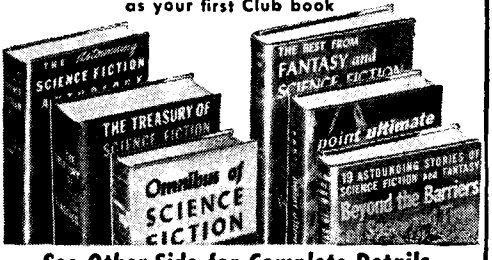
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